

No 2

5 cents.

WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY WEEKLY. EVERY WEEK.

OFF THE TICKER;

OR, FATE AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE.

By TOM DAWSON.



"That vital, fateful word—it's coming now!" trembled fascinated Dal. "So's death!" shrieked Tom Green, leaping forward. Darting to the iron door, murderous Mulford seized the handle to pull it shut and bolt the boys in with their fiery doom!

WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

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By TOM DAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

DAL'S FIRST CHANCE TO DO THINGS.

"Whew! You've got a tough job now."

"Not so bad," replied Dal.

"It will keep you here until ten o'clock to-night."

"Humph!" grunted Syd Adams. "You must love work!"

"I do."

"Huh!"

"I've loved work ever since I came here," Dal went on, blithely. "I'm working for Spofford now."

"That's a great privilege, ain't it?"

"It is and it isn't," Dal pursued, smiling. "If there's any real brains and smartness in me, Spofford will find it out and give me a chance to boost myself ahead in life. If I'm a failure—a miss—Spofford will find it out and fire me. I'll stand by the result of whether I keep my job."

"Huh!" growled Syd. "So you think real merit counts in this shop?"

"Why, everybody knows it does," retorted Dal. "Look at the fellows who've been promoted up high here in the last two years. They didn't have to wait for any one else to die, either, but just stepped up over other fellow's heads."

"Huh! Yes! And look at the bunch of fellows who have been bounced in the last three months!" sniffed Syd.

"Just because there wasn't any real stuff in 'em," snapped Dal. "I tell you, it's the test—working for Spofford."

The man who can't get along here will prove to be a failure anywhere you put him in life."

"Oh, well, if you think so!" grunted Syd, exasperatedly. "But if you happen to be among those who are bounced I suppose you'll take a different view of this queer, crazy old shop."

"Are you trying to get me bounced?" demanded Dal, drily.

"What makes you say that?" queried Syd, sharply.

"Why, you're standing here wasting my time and your own—no, not our time, but Spofford's. He pays for it."

"Oh, bother!" came impatiently from Syd. "I don't think——"

"Maybe you don't, but I want to. Run along—sprint—skiddoo!"

And Dal, with a scowling face, made a shooing motion that drove Syd off in disgust.

Then Dal settled down busily to his work.

It seemed like unimportant clerical work.

It consisted merely of the copying of long lists of securities, for Spofford's was one of the great financial houses of the day.

John Spofford enjoyed the reputation, among most of his employes, and with a very large share of the public, of being "the only square man" among the great money kings.

Probably Spofford owned a couple of hundred million dollars of his own. In addition, he had entrusted to his keeping hundreds of millions more from the general speculating public.

He was a power in the money world. A few words from Spofford were often enough to send a stock up or down.

The public trusted him and looked upon him as a friend.

Spofford's enemies were among the other great money kings, many of whom were banded together for the purpose—well, to put it plainly—for the purpose of robbing that section of the public which bought stocks for investment or speculation.

Nine-tenths of Spofford's employes were his fast and devoted friends.

This great money king played no favorites among those who toiled in his busy offices.

He employed every new man or boy. In his own quiet way, Spofford watched the work of every employe, and knew what it was worth.

Promotion went only by merit and good showing.

An office boy might be raised to a confidential position inside of a couple of years. If he had the "right stuff" in him he was sure to be.

Dal Denby was one of the newest of the employes of Spofford.

Left homeless by the death of his mother, when he was fourteen, Dal had traveled from a country town to New York City.

He had sold papers, blacked boots, carried hand luggage—had done almost anything for a while, and had made little money at it.

Then he had secured a position as office boy—had held three or four such positions, in fact, and at last, a half year before the opening of this narrative, he had entered Spofford's as an office boy.

In two months Dal found himself promoted to the telephone switchboard.

Just two weeks before the present day he had been sent to one of the accounting desks, for John Spofford had discovered, in some way of his own, that Dal had been taking night lessons in bookkeeping.

Dal felt reasonably certain, therefore, that he was pleasing "the old man," as Spofford's employes called him, although the money king was but a trifle past fifty.

"Mr. Adams will report to Mr. Spofford!" called an office boy, passing through the room in which the two clerks were employed.

Syd got down off his chair in haste. He looked half frightened, half pleased, as he started for Spofford's private office.

"Perhaps Syd's chance has come," murmured Dal, across the top of the double desk, on the other side of which Tom Green worked. "I hope he's going to get his chance."

Tom, plodding steadily away over a ledger, glanced up for just an instant, shook his head, seriously, then resumed his work.

Tom was not likely to be advanced very far at Spofford's but he was at least fairly certain of being able to hold his job.

He was not very clever, but a good, patient, faithful plodder—and there is need of some of this kind in the world.

Dal worked faithfully away during the next twenty minutes.

Then, hearing a step, he glanced around swiftly.

Syd was coming back, his face a picture of wrath and disgust.

"I guess I must be a failure," Syd stopped to say.

"What's the trouble?" Dal inquired.

"Old man said he wouldn't need me any longer. Gave me an order on the cashier for my pay up to Saturday. Oh, it's rotten—working for that kind of a fellow. I never will again."

"No, I suppose not," said Dal, drily. "There are very few Spoffords in the world."

"But what do you think of a man who—" began Syd.

"Perhaps I'll tell you after office hours—not now. I've got my hands full attending to my own business," Dal retorted.

"But—"

"Please go, Syd. I need all my time to attend to business."

For another hour Dal plugged away at his task.

It was 11.30 now, and luncheon-time would come in half an hour.

"I'll cut luncheon short," thought the boy. "I'd like to get this work done as early to-night as I can."

Denby did not sigh, as many another seventeen-year-old youngster would have done, over the long evening of work.

Night work was of common occurrence in Spofford's office.

In fact, there was a small force of clerks who came on in the evening and remained all night, for Spofford's offices in that old building on a side street, not far from Wall Street, were never closed.

"Mr. Denby will report to Mr. Spofford's office at once!" called a boy as he passed our hero's desk.

Dal Denby almost fell backward off his stool.

It was not often that Spofford sent for his "small-fry" workers. When he did it always meant something out of the usual.

"I wonder whether the old man is giving all his attention to firing boys this morning?" thrilled Denby, as he hurried down the long corridor that led to the private offices of the money king.

First of all, Dal entered the public office, where people in general waited for a chance to see the money king.

At a gate at the further end of this office Dal was obliged to state his errand to the burly watchman on guard there.

Then he passed through into an office, where half a dozen confidential clerks had their desks.

Now, a short corridor, and here, at the door of the money king's very private office stood Mulford, broad-shouldered and powerful-looking.

It was Mulford's business to watch that private door—to admit no one whom Spofford did not want to see.

"I've been sent for," Dal explained.

"I know," nodded Mulford, and swung open the door.

As Dal entered the charmed room of money greatness—the first time he had been there since the day when he was engaged—he saw the same large and rather bare-looking apartment.

In this there was a big rolltop desk, a massive safe, and a few chairs.

But Dal's whole gaze was on the man at the desk.

John Spofford, as he heard the boy's step, whirled about.

"Oh, it's you, Denby?"

"Yes, sir."

Spofford was rather tall, slightly bald and more than slightly stout. He had a round, rosy face that would have been jolly had it not been for the cares that a great business printed across his features.

So far as the employes of the place knew, Spofford never joked and seldom smiled.

But Spofford did smile, for just a second, now, as he motioned to Dal to sit in the chair close to the desk.

"You're rather young, aren't you, Denby?"

"Seventeen, sir."

"Younger than I thought."

Dal remained silent.

"Here's a little document that may interest you," continued the money king, unfolding a paper and passing it to our hero.

"Shall I read it now, sir?"

"Of course."

Dal's eyes swam with mist as he took in the first few lines.

"Why, sir, this is your power of attorney for thirty days, authorizing me to——"

"Sh!"

The warning exclamation was barely audible, but Spofford's fingers gripped the boy's shoulders hard as he passed Dal on tip-toe and went softly toward the door.

Without making a sound, Spofford reached the door, jerking it swiftly open.

Mulford, the guard of this door, down on his knees, with one ear to the key-hole, all but lost his balance and fell into the room.

"I was just going to call you, Mulford," said "the old man," quietly. "Report to the head porter for something that you're to do. Go at once."

Mulford, turning first very red, and then very white, shambled to his feet, muttering something under his breath.

But he went without a word, Spofford watching the prying fellow until he had passed into the office of the confidential clerks.

Then, returning to his desk, the money king muttered, half aloud:

"Confound these spies! Still, they're useful, sometimes."

Turning to his telephone, the money king sent a message, in a few words, that Dal neither understood nor tried to understand.

"Now we're safe from prying, Denby," resumed the "old man," turning once more to our hero. "Let me see that you comprehend that paper."

"Why, it authorizes me, sir, at any time within thirty days, to order your brokers to buy or sell one hundred thousand shares of General Traction stock at par, or to sell the same number at ninety."

"Exactly," said his employer, shortly.

Dal waited, not attempting to speak.

"The work you were on this morning will be given to another," went on Mr. Spofford. "When you go back, go into that little office off your present room. Seat yourself at the desk. As the stock and other financial news comes off the ticker on the tape, read the tape, cut it up and paste it on sheets of paper. Send those sheets, by office boy, to Mr. Dalton. That's all you'll appear to be doing."

John Spofford placed great emphasis on the word "appear."

"Now, listen well," continued the great money king: "As you will understand, you are holding in your hand my authorization to make a ten-million-dollar deal for me. Really, it means more, for countless millions of other people's money will be at stake. You grasp that?"

"Yse, sir."

"You're to buy or sell, at the figures given, according to your own judgment—as far as that paper shows. As a fact, you're to buy or sell strictly according to my order."

"You'll call me here when you want to give the order?" Dal queried.

"I shan't be here, after another hour. I'm going out of town. No one will know where I am. I shall send no word to the office."

"Then, where shall I get my orders, sir?"

"Off the ticker!"

Dal felt a trifle staggered.

The "old man" meant to go away into such seclusion that he would not even send a telegram to his own office. Yet he would send in the order for a deal involving countless millions on the tape of the stock ticker, where it would be read by every man interested in the busy money market!

"Remember," said Spofford, briefly, "the one word, 'ozone.' It isn't a common word. It will mean everything to you—when you find it on the ticker. If you fail to find it there, you'll cost me a big fortune, and ruin hundreds of people. Do you understand?"

Understand? Dal felt as if his head was whirling so fast that he must fall off the chair.

"I shall keep my eyes glued to the tape of the ticker," he replied, huskily.

CHAPTER II.

A POISONOUS SNAKE WITH HANDS AND FEET.

"Now, let every word that I say sink in deep," were the words from his employer that brought Dal Denby out of his trance.

"The first time you see the word 'ozone' on the ticker,

that means for you to get ready by going to the vault room for this power of attorney. It'll be in the little green safe. Here's a key to the safe. Get the power of attorney, put it in your pocket, and be ready for the second time that you find the word 'ozone' on the ticker, which will be very soon after. This second time you find the word 'ozone' on the tape, my name will be mentioned in connection in the same sentence. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"There will also be in that sentence a word that expresses the meaning of going up, or else a word that may be interpreted as going down. If it's up, hurry to my brokers and buy one hundred thousand shares of General Traction. If the word means down, then hustle to sell the shares. Got that straight?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, here's the key to the vault room, and here's a slip of paper giving the combination that you have to have besides the key. Read the combination and repeat it to me."

Dal read through the letters of the combination twice, then repeated them.

"You won't forget any part of this?" asked the money king, sharply.

"Not a word, sir. It's all burned in my brain, I believe," Dal answered, simply.

"Good! Now when you go back to your desk you'll find another clerk there. Go to the office and sit beside the ticker from now on. When you get the first 'ozone' off the ticker, you will want some safe fellow to go to the vault room with you. He must go to the broker's with you, too. That's for your protection if any trickery is tried against you. Who is a good, safe, steady, reliable fellow for the job?"

"Tom Green, sir," Dal replied, without loss of a second.

"Very good. By the time you reach your old desk, Green will be at your orders. Remember, you're not to tell him what's up."

"I won't."

"Nor any one else."

"No, sir."

"There are a few spies in this place," went on the "old man," grimly. "I think I know most of them. You saw how I caught Mulford listening at that door. Don't talk, and don't let any one get an idea that you've anything unusual on."

"I won't," Dal replied, gravely. He felt as if he had aged twenty years since entering this private office.

"You can take your lunch between twelve and one every day. The signal word won't come during the noon hour. But it's likely to come at any other hour that the stock market is open. When the Stock Exchange closes for the day, you're through, too, for that day. Now go!"

This sudden dismissal came with the abruptness of a jolt.

Dal sprang to his feet as if an electric wire had become suddenly busy under him.

"Good morning, sir."

"Good morning, Denby."

As our hero turned and hastened away, John Spofford sat looking after his clerk with approving gaze.

"He'll do—he's got to do!" murmured the money king, anxiously, as the swinging door shut Dal out from his view. "He has been faithful and he isn't old enough or experienced enough to see through the game for his own profit at my expense. He'll do! He's got to do! But it's a fearfully big stake to place on a boy so young!"

As Dal had said, every word of his instructions seemed burned into his brain. It did not seem possible that he could forget or go wrong.

Just before he reached his old desk, where Hubbard, another clerk, was already seated, Dal gave a start at realizing that he did not have the power of attorney with him.

"Oh, of course!" he muttered. "Spofford took it back again, and will lock it up in the green safe in the vault room."

There was a new cleark at Tom Green's desk, too.

Tom stood close by his former job, eyeing our hero as the latter came up.

"At your orders," was Tom's greeting.

"Our job is in that little office over there, now," Dal replied, and led the way.

The door to the little room was unlocked, and both boys passed inside, our hero carefully closing the door.

"Well?" demanded Tom, curiously.

"It's an easy enough job," Dal returned, briefly. "You're to sit at that desk, with paste-pot and shears. I'm to read the tape off the ticker, and then pass the tape to you. You cut it up into lengths, and paste it on sheets. Whenever you get two or three sheets ready, call an office boy and send the sheets to Mr. Dalton."

"I see. Well?"

"That's all I know," retorted Dal, briefly.

"See here, Dal, do you mean to say that we've been taken off real work and sent in here to play the monkey?"

"I've nothing but my orders," came from Dal Denby. "I'm not going back of them."

"I suppose that's right," nodded Tom, seating himself at the desk, which was already supplied with the scissors, paste and paper that he needed. "But I wonder what the old man's real game is?"

"If he had wanted me to know he'd have told me," Dal rejoined. "But," he added, warily, mindful of the secrecy that had been imposed upon him, "my orders haven't much to do with Spofford. I report to Mr. Dalton."

"Do we take orders from Dalton?" Tom wanted to know.

"You don't Tom. You get yours from me."

Denby glanced up at the clock, discovering that it was five minutes after noon.

"This is where we go to lunch," he announced.

"All right, boss," grinned Tom, and jumped up quickly. Being chums, the two youngsters went to lunch together.

Tom was silent, wondering what the whole game could be. Dal, who knew more of what was going on, was thinking in a different strain.

"That's just like old Spofford, from all I've heard of him," our hero's brain ran on, busily. "For months he

doesn't seem to know that I'm there. Now he sends for me and trusts a fortune in my hands. He doesn't even take the trouble to say that he trusts me, but he must. Dal, old fellow, if you keep your head and don't let it get swelled, I guess your chance has come. Keep your wits, Dal, my boy, and I guess you'll, bye-and-bye, find yourself one of the prize winners in that queer old money shop."

At five minutes before one Dal Denby had both himself and Tom back in the little office with the ticker.

For the next two hours or more it seemed to Dal that he must be in a fever.

Not once, when the ticker was clicking, did he let his staring gaze wander from the little tape that fluttered between his fingers.

Three times, at least, did the name of Spofford appear in the afternoon's stock market news, but not once did "ozone" stare him in the face from the tape.

Tom Green, meanwhile, patiently pasted the cut-up tape and dispatched the sheets to Mr. Dalton, who was one of the managers of the office.

Then came the message which showed that the Stock Exchange had closed for the day.

"That's all, Tom," Denby announced.

"What?"

"We're through when the market closes."

"What? Through at this time of the day? Ain't that great! Dal, how long does this job last?"

"Search me," was the non-committal answer of the young boss of the ticker room.

Anxious looks followed the two young clerks as they passed out with their hats on.

"What are you going to do the rest of the afternoon, Dal?" Tom asked.

"Walk about Wall Street a bit, I guess."

"Then it's me off for the Y. M. C. A. gym," announced Green, who was an ardent follower of physical culture. "What time do I get down in the morning?"

"Quarter to nine."

"Great! Well, so long, boss!"

At a swinging stride, Tom was off.

Dal walked more slowly. He turned into Wall Street, for that great highway of money possessed an overpowering fascination for him.

Dal had already mapped out his future.

He meant to be one of the great financial powers of the future.

That was his fixed ambition. All that was left was for him to realize it!

Denby had walked almost to the entrance to the Stock Exchange when he felt an eager hand on his shoulder.

Turning, he found himself gazing up into the sinister eyes of Mulford, the confidential guard who had been that morning shifted to a less important position in Spofford's office.

"Where are you going, Denby?" queried the big fellow.

"Just taking a walk," Dal replied.

"Good!" Mulford whispered, eagerly. "I want you to take a little walk with me."

"Where?"

"To the place I'm going to. See here, lad," and Mulford bent over, whispering eagerly and mysteriously though not one man in the hurrying throngs that surged past them gave as much as a glance at either, "there is a good deal in taking this walk with me!"

"A good deal in it?" repeated Dal. "What on earth do you mean?"

"There's a chance for you to make big money."

"What are you talking about?"

"You know what you and old Spofford were talking about this morning?"

Dal was instantly on his guard, suspicious and foxy.

"Yes, I know," he replied. "But there was no big money in that talk."

"There is, if you'll give straight news about that same talk," Mulford insisted, and the big fellow trembled in his eagerness.

"See here, Mulford"—Dal's voice rang sharply—"if you've got anything to say, you'd better say it straight and quick. Don't beat about the bush."

Mulford's big frame shook with eagerness as he whispered:

"Boy, there are parties who stand ready to pay two hundred thousand dollars—cash spot down—for a straight account of all that Spofford said to you this morning. What do you say?"

"People ready to pay me such a tremendous price as that?" Dal quivered, inwardly. If Spofford could have foreseen that I'd have an offer like this—but of course he foresaw it. That shows me how thoroughly he has trusted me."

But the boy's eyes blazed angrily as he looked up again at the big fellow.

"Mulford," he quavered, "are you such a poisonous human snake that you'll work for Spofford and take his wages, and yet be ready to sell him out at the first chance?"

"Rats!" grinned Mulford, anxiously. "We're all working for ourselves, ain't we? That's what everybody does in Wall Street, ain't it?"

"I suppose we must look after ourselves first," Dal admitted, with a strange smile.

"That's the way to talk!"

"This is straight goods about my price, is it?"

"Straight as a string!"

"Lead the way, then!"

With a snort of joy Mulford thrust one arm through our hero's and walked him briskly down the street.

Dal had just one thing he wanted to know.

Was the "System" back of this attempt to make him betray his trust?

"The System" was the name popularly applied to a collection of several of the great money kings of the United States.

These men of the "System" were banded together to boost stocks up or down, as suited their own purposes in the fleecing of the public.

This robbery of the people the "System" carried on largely through the stock market.

The "System" controlled the money market in every way in its power, and went even to the length of buying up State legislatures and other governing bodies in order to secure the passage of laws that would aid in the System's schemes for getting richer at the expense of the common people of the country.

John Spofford stood out as the one powerful opponent of the System.

Time and again the System had tried to crush Spofford in the money markets, but always, so far, they had failed.

"Is the System trying to bribe me into helping them to ruin the 'old man' now?" was the thought that kept buzzing in Dal's busy brain, as he walked along with Mulford. "Gracious! The more I think it over the more certain it seems that, if the System could buy me, body and soul, they could ruin honest, fighting old John Spofford!"

Mulford had slowed his eager steps, and was turning in toward a broad door.

Dal looked. He saw what he had expected—the entrance to the great skyscraper in which the System was known to have its Wall Street headquarters.

"Here we are," whispered Mulford, hoarsely.

"Who are we going to see?" Dal asked.

"You'll mighty soon be talking to the parties!"

"And they'll really pay that amazing price for what I can tell 'em?"

"It's a cinch—a copper-riveted certainty!" his guide declared, warmly.

Dal hung back slightly as Mulford tried to press him forward into the building.

Our hero was debating within himself whether to go further, and find out just who the men were who were behind this attack on John Spofford.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROWLER AT WORK.

"Come right along," spoke Mulford, eagerly, taking a tighter grip on the boy's arm.

"Shall I?" wondered the boy. "Shall I try to find out what and who is behind this queer piece of work?"

In his hesitation he hung back.

"You ain't going to back out now, are you?"

Mulford's tone was suddenly anxious.

There was a tremble in the tone, as if he had played for high stakes and feared to lose.

"Don't be a baby or a fool," he urged. "Come right on in and get your money—big money!"

But Dal had suddenly made his decision.

"All Spofford expects of me is to follow orders to the letter. If I vary a hair's breadth from the orders I'm almost sure to make a huge mistake."

"What are you hanging back for?" Mulford persisted. "Come along!"

"No; I guess I won't," spoke Dal, coolly.

"What's that?" his companion cried, hoarsely. "Going back on me, are you? I've a good mind to kill you! I'm desperate, Denby, and I won't stand any fooling!"

If looks could have killed, as the big fellow blazed savagely into the boy's eyes, Dal Denby would have been dead right then and there.

But Dal's face suddenly rippled into a smile. He looked mightily amused.

"Been playing with me, have you?" raged the big fellow, unmindful of the crowd of Wall Street men that hurried by without bothering its heads about this pair.

Dal laughed heartily now. His glee, though, was all sham.

"What you laughing at?" Mulford glared.

"I'm amused at you, Mulford."

"Oh, you are, eh, you——"

"I'm wondering what your con is."

"My con?"

"Yes. What kind of an old confidence game are you trying to play on me, anyway? Offering me a fortune to go and tell somebody what John Spofford said to me in his office this morning?"

"It's no con. The money's ready. Don't you want it?"

"Yes, of course I do. But I wouldn't get it—not even if I sold my soul out as you are pretending to be doing. No sane man would pay me more than two dollars, at the outside, to know what instructions I got about my new job this morning."

Mulford's face had taken on a more dangerous shade now.

He was at white heat—a man who could not be trifled with.

"It's you, Dal Denby, who are giving the con," he quivered. "Don't try to argue. Are you going to keep your bargain with me—or are you going to take the consequences?"

"Neither," laughed Hal. "I'm going to skiddoo."

"And throw away all that money?" insisted the big fellow, hoarsely.

"It isn't there."

"And throw me down on the big stake I was to get out of this business."

He looked as if he would pounce upon the boy and tear him to pieces with those big, powerful hands of his.

Dal shivered a little, despite the protection that seemed to be all around him in the presence of the passing crowd.

"You make me think of the figure of that face carved in the stone up over that entrance," remarked Dal, pointing up overhead before them.

Mulford looked, for an instant.

He heard Dal dart off, turned and pursued.

Denby had dashed into the road, and was now on the further side of a passing truck.

Muttering curses, Mulford followed the boy.

But Dal had rounded the truck and lost himself in the passing crowd.

While Mulford regained the sidewalk, and stood staring in all directions, Dal turned a corner and soon was past pursuit.

"Now, what on earth does it all mean?" he gasped, in bewilderment. "The whole thing, from Spofford's instructions on, is a puzzle. It makes my brain ache! I used to think I'd like to be one of Spofford's important men. I wonder if they all get such dizzying, meaningless, bewildering jobs as the one that has come to me?"

Dal felt the need of open air to clear away the cobwebs that befogged his brain.

Walking well over to the West Side of the great, big town, he turned his face uptown.

Meaning to walk only a part of the way, Dal kept on and on.

When he really began to understand where he was, he concluded that he was so near home that he would finish the distance on foot.

Down West Twenty-fourth Street he turned, and kept on until he was well over toward the shore of the North River.

He halted, at last, before a three-story brick house. He went slowly up the steps, let himself in with a latch-key, and climbed two flights of stairs. With another key he opened the door of a tiny attic room.

Dal was at home—the only home he knew. It was a tiny little bit of a room, with a cot, two chairs, a wash-stand and a small, battered trunk.

On top of the trunk rested the half dozen books that our hero owned. With them was an old magazine and a Sunday paper.

No window was there to this room. The only light came through half of the skylight that lighted his room and the next.

Out of the nine dollars a week that he got at Spofford's, Dal paid four for this room, with the morning and evening meals.

"Home!" muttered Dal, queerly, as he glanced around the tiny, stuffy little place. "Oh, no matter! If I stick to my 'ozone' orders I'll soon have a better place than this."

It being nearly dark in the room in the April evening, Dal lighted a gas-jet that had been all but stopped with plaster of paris. By this dim glow the boy sat down to think.

His watch showed him that it was nearly supper-time. He wondered if he had appetite enough to eat.

"Wonder if Tom's back?" he muttered, rising.

Tom Green, by virtue of paying a little more out of his ten weekly dollars, and having a roommate, was able to have a little better quarters on the floor below.

As Dal rose, the two keys that had been given him by Mr. Spofford jangled together in his pocket.

"Those keys! Oh, yes, I must look well after them," reflected the boy. "Wouldn't there be the deuce to pay if I lost 'em?"

Taking the keys out, he tied them together with a piece of string.

"I really ought not to carry them about at night," he reflected.

Down on his knees he went, prowling under the cot.

The edge of the dingy carpet by the wall was loosely laid. Dal slipped the keys in under the carpet, then rose.

"No one would think of looking there, even if he knew I had the keys," smiled the boy.

Then, going out, he locked the door and ran nimbly down to the floor below.

"Yes, I'm going to supper," replied Tom, who was busy washing up.

"And what are you going to do this evening?"

"Nothing especial. Let's you and me go for a walk. It don't cost anything. Go up and get your hat, and we'll go direct from the table."

Dal ran up. He thrilled with a feeling that he couldn't explain when he saw the door of his room slightly open.

"Why, I thought I locked it," he quivered. "I—"

He pushed the door open—then fell back a step—aghast.

There before him, crouching as if for a spring, was Mulford!

"You here?" gasped Dal, in a voice hardly above a whisper. "How did you get here?"

"Shut your mouth!" hissed Mulford.

"Not until you tell me what you're doing here."

"You fool, shut up! Let me by!"

"You can't—shan't—go!"

Mulford sneered and took a quick step forward.

He regarded the boy as being too small, too soft, too timid to offer resistance.

That was just where he made his mistake.

For Dal Denby, without turning his face away, had jumped backward to a closet door.

Like a flash he reached in behind him—and now Dal Denby stood barring the passage to the stairs.

Over his head he swung a bed-slat—an ugly enough looking weapon in the hands of a desperate boy.

"Get out of the way! Don't make a muss!" quavered Mulford, taking cautious, crafty step forward.

Swat! Dal didn't hesitate a second.

Down came the slat across the top of Mulford's head.

Had the big fellow really believed that the blow was coming he might have fended it off.

Instead, he went down to the floor under the suddenness of the determined attack.

Swat! For Dal, fighting like a tiger at bay, had followed up the first blow with a second.

"Stop it!" roared Mulford.

"Get back into that room, then!"

"Stand back!" roared Mulford, leaping to his feet and parrying a third blow that came without an instant's loss of time.

"Get back there and give an account of yourself!" stormed Denby, his eyes flashing with a light that had never been seen there before.

Crack! As this blow descended, Mulford caught the slat in his hands.

Like a flash he dropped it, sprang forward, landed a

blow on the boy's stomach that drove all his breath out.

Dal fell backward, weakly, while Mulford sprang down the stairs.

The street door slammed before Dal was able to call:

"Tom! Tom Green! Quick!"

"What's the blasted row?" queried Tom, from his door below.

Then, seeing Dal standing weakly, holding to the balluster rail, Tom darted up the stairs.

"Turn around—hot-foot—try to catch Mulford!" quivered the boy.

For just an instant Green looked dazed. Then, swiftly comprehending, he turned and bolted down the stairs.

Dal followed as soon as he could get his wind.

But out in the street both young fellows halted, nonplussed.

Mulford was not to be seen.

"What was the row about, anyway?" Tom demanded, curiously, as they went up the steps again together.

"The fellow was prowling in my room."

"Forget it, then," advised Tom, cheerily. "There's nothing up there worth stealing."

"Oh, isn't there?" Dal flashed, inwardly. "But he didn't have time to get it."

Dal went straight to the landlady to demand how Mulford had gotten into the house.

"What kind of a looking man was he?" asked the woman.

Dal described Mulford.

"Why, a man like that rented the room next to yours an hour ago," the woman announced.

"The—room—next to mine?" panted Dal, staring at her hard.

"Yes, and paid me the week's money in advance. He seemed like a nice enough sort of a—why, where's that boy gone to?" gasped the landlady.

Tom, too, looked mighty puzzled as he stared toward the stairs.

Dal had rushed up the first flight, two steps at a time.

The next flight he took as swiftly.

Straight into his room he dashed, slamming the door behind him.

Down on his knees—under the cot—Dal fumbled at the carpet with trembling fingers.

"Gone!" he cried, hoarsely. "Oh, merciful heaven—gone!"

He came out from under the cot, straightened up like one in a trance.

Cold shivers seemed to have taken possession of his body.

"How did Mulford know where to look for the keys?" he quivered, his brain swaying with the horror of the awful luck that had fallen upon him.

Swiftly, like one who races without knowing the reason why, young Denby threw himself out of his room and into the one that Mulford had rented.

For two or three seconds he stared about him.

Then, with a cry, he dashed at the wooden partition wall.

Mulford had bored two or three small holes in that partition with a gimlet.

The feeble light, shining through these holes, had caught the boy's gaze.

"Why, I can see about everything in my room," groaned Dal. "Of course he saw me hide the keys. Oh, how easy it all was—how infernally easy!"

Not for more than ten seconds did that dazed, agonized spell last.

Dal Denby was, naturally, a boy of action.

Despair could not long chain him when there was swift work to be done.

"Those keys!" he blazed, as he sprang for the door. "Those keys! Mulford! I'll have the keys back if I have to take his life!"

Uttering that rash threat, Dal dashed down the two flights of stairs.

In his frenzy he had no time to think whether he really meant his deadly threat.

He knew only that the keys were gone—that Mulford had them!

"The scoundrel! The traitor! The cur!"

Slam went the street door behind him, just as slow-moving Tom Green came out of the landlady's room.

Tom walked rather briskly to the door, went out, and stared.

He was just in time to see flying Dal turn the corner, eastward—resolute, wrathful Dal off on the errand of his life!

CHAPTER IV.

DAL TURNS DESPERATELY TO HIGHWAY ROBBERY.

"On Eighth Avenue—west—just north of Thirty-second Street!"

That address Dal quivered out as he darted along up Ninth Avenue.

He was fortunate enough to catch a car.

He boarded it, then groaned over every stop.

"It's going faster than I could run, though, without attracting the attention of the police," he reasoned, desperately.

For well he knew that the sight of a frantic boy, running desperately up the avenue, would raise a shout of "Stop thief!"

There would be a pursuit, a capture. He could explain and get away, but the delay would drive him nearly crazy in these awful, precious minutes.

It seemed as if the journey took an age, but at last he dropped off at Thirty-second Street.

Hurrying across the block, he halted on Eighth Avenue and looked about him.

He had once heard of the neighborhood in which Mulford lived. Fortunately, he remembered it.

But now a new and terrifying doubt came up.

"Has Mulford gone home, or has he raced away somewhere else to deliver those keys?"

It was terrifying to Dal Denby, that awful uncertainty. He felt almost too dizzy to stand up.

Then he started, quivered anew, stiffened up, and was at once his own self.

There, on the other side of the avenue, was Mulford, walking briskly along.

Dal had a desperate impulse to dash across the street and throttle the big fellow.

But he realized that he couldn't do it. Mulford was too big and strong to be bested in a fair fight.

"Foxy, boy!" Dal ordered himself.

He slunk into a doorway, watching.

Mulford's face expressed complete satisfaction as Dal watched him from across the avenue.

"Oh, you've won out!" quivered the boy, wretchedly. "But wait—wait! I'll have those keys, if I have to take your life along with them!"

Again our hero failed to realize how bloodthirsty his threat sounded.

He could think of nothing but keys!

Mulford was thinking, apparently, of nothing but his own easy success, for he grinned, darkly, and stepped as if treading on air.

Then, suddenly, Dal froze stiff with the coming of a new, dreadful thought.

"Why, that scoundrel could go right to the vault room—to the little green safe—if he suspects. No one at Spofford's could stop him. Having the keys would give him authority enough to enter the vault, for the old man doesn't give written orders when he can help it."

Mulford in the vault! Mulford in possession of the power of attorney, ready to turn it over to the money kings, who had paid him to turn traitor to his employer.

The chain of consequences that flashed up before the boy's mind made him sick and desperate.

"Oh! That gives me just a bare hope!"

Dal's discovering eyes followed the big form of Mulford passing between the two swinging doors of a saloon.

"Going in to celebrate his good luck!" quivered the boy. "If he'll only take enough to get foozled——"

Dal was off, across the street, edging down toward the door of the gin-mill.

Stealing close to the swinging doors, he peeped in through the crack between the doors.

Yes, there was Mulford, standing at the bar, drinking.

"Oh, pshaw!" muttered Dal, disgustedly.

Mulford had a small glass of beer in his hand—not even a large one.

Young Denby, though he knew nothing about intoxicating drinks from his own experience, still knew that beer did not intoxicate quickly.

"He'll come out as sober as an owl," quivered the boy, disappointedly.

He moved backward across the street, getting into a deep doorway from which he could watch both the front and the side door of the gin-mill.

"What's that I've read about knockout drops?" the boy wondered. "It's some kind of stuff they put in a fellow's drink and make him go to sleep. I wish I knew how the stuff is made—where to get some of it!"

In fact, every desperate kind of measure was receiving some share of Denby's attention.

For once in his life he realized the full meaning of desperation.

Somehow—it mattered not in the least just how—he must get possession of the pair of keys that he doubted not were in one of Mulford's pockets at this very moment.

"Why don't they teach boys at school how to pick pockets?" was one of the wild thoughts that found a brief resting place in Denby's brain.

As he glanced about him in the doorway for a moment, Dal espied something that made his eyes snap.

It was a short, heavy stick, left there probably by some child at play.

It was a fairly heavy bludgeon, though, and young Denby pounced upon it with a cry of joyous discovery.

"I begin to feel like a highwayman," he muttered, gripping the club tight. "Gracious! What a fearful thing a deadly passion must be! I wonder if that's what's got hold of me now?"

His gaze was fast to the saloon's two entrances once more.

Three or four men had passed in and out while he stood there.

"I hope that scoundrel is filling up with something that'll make him stupid," thought Denby, vengefully.

But, no!

Here was Mulford now, walking disgracefully straight, as our hero thought, wrathfully.

He was coming across the avenue, too.

Shrinking back further into the hallway, gripping the club more desperately than ever, Dal waited, hardly daring to breathe.

Mulford did not pass him, but passed the corner instead, going on down Thirty-second Street.

Ere Mulford had gone fifty feet beyond the corner, Dal was out of his hiding place and peering around the corner.

Yes, there was Mulford walking steadily along.

The long block between the two avenues seemed to be unusually deserted.

"Now's my time," thought Dal Denby, starting down the block in swift, stealthy pursuit. "I hope he doesn't hear me!"

Mulford was neither hurrying nor looking backward.

He was going along with the easy gait and unconcerned air of a man who knows that he is safe in the heart of a great city.

Nearer and nearer crept Dal.

His heart thumped with the excitement and the suspense of the thing.

He held his breath, that that might not betray his presence to the rear.

Once as he stole along after his quarry he thought that Mulford was going to turn.

The shock of that dread made the boy's heart stand still.

But Mulford did not turn.

Dal was near—ever getting nearer!

He looked like an assassin creeping upon his prey.

Club ready, and gripped tightly in his right hand, young Denby covered the last of the distance that separated them.

He was within easy striking distance now—with Mulford wholly unconscious of danger.

"A good blow, a straight one, a strong one!" Dal quavered, inwardly.

Up went the club—down it came!

But not for the head.

Dal, who had recklessly felt that he could almost take life for the sake of getting those keys back, now found it simply impossible to aim his bludgeon at the top of the unsuspecting Mulford's head.

Crack! The club landed athwart of Mulford's right shoulder.

It was a forceful assault, delivered with all the strength of a desperate purpose.

From Mulford came a shriek, then a groan.

Though hit only on the shoulder, the fellow pitched and fell.

Like a flash the boy was a-top of him.

You?" gasped the wretch.

"Give me those keys!" stormed Dal, in a low but penetrating tone.

Somehow—he did not know himself how he did the trick—Denby instantly got a hold on Mulford's throat, his arm in front, the stick pressing behind.

Against that vise-like strangle the big fellow squirmed and struggled.

"It's no use!" hissed Dal. "You've got to give up those keys or take the consequences."

Mulford's tongue was protruding, the veins of his neck and face swelling.

Dal, who rather under-guessed the amount of choking that a strong man can stand, let go the pressure then, but passed his hands swiftly over the fellow's clothing.

Ah! There the keys were—must be.

In frantic haste Dal Denby thrust his hand into the discovered pocket, drew it forth.

He had the keys!

That was all he realized.

Leaping up, he turned and darted, making like a human greyhound for Ninth Avenue.

"Help! Murder! Police! Thieves!" he heard Mulford shout, lustily.

"Stop the hold-up man! Stop him! Catch him! Lynch him!"

There was the sound of many swift feet in pursuit.

Dal tried to redouble his speed.

Rap!

That sound made the boy sick at heart. He knew it, recognized it—trembled.

It was the signal given by a policeman's club against the pavement.

"Stop him! That's a hold-up man! Catch him!"

"A crowd will be laying for me at the corner!" thought the fleeing boy, desperately, as he neared Ninth Avenue.

But he must take a chance.

Nothing but death or a strong arm should stop him now.

As Dal reached the corner, wheeling south, he had an instant's glance of nearly a dozen men in full chase behind.

He had a good start. No one on the avenue seemed to understand that the boy was a fugitive from justice.

A dozen doors or so down the avenue, and Dal was seized by an inspiration.

A man, taking his key out of one of the front doors, was about to pass inside.

It took but a fraction of a second to think it out in this desperate plight.

Right behind the man as he entered was young Denby.

Not turning to look around, the man let the door swing back.

Dal just dodged inside, then closed the door himself.

Upstairs went the man, turned the balustrade and started on up another flight.

But Dal was safe—or hoped he was.

Out on the avenue he heard flying feet go past him.

"Stop the thief!"

But, even as Dal listened, he heard the pursuing feet slacken in their speed.

Quivering, afraid to peer out, Dal waited and listened.

"It would be the toughest kind of luck to get arrested now—kept away from the ticker and that word, 'ozone,'" he faltered. "I wonder if every fellow the police are after feels as I feel now?"

What was that? Voices! The pursuing party coming, disgustedly, back, evidently.

There was Mulford's voice, saying:

"Talk about your queer hold-ups, officer. That was the queerest ever. Just a boy, that I could eat up, if I got at him fair. But he soaked me from behind with a club, downed me and began choking me with a strangle-hold between his arm and his club. Then he went through my pockets before I could breathe. Oh, he was a terror, to do a quick thing like that!"

"Ever see the kid before?" sounded the policeman's voice.

Dal strained his ears, but the late pursuers had passed out of earshot.

"And I've got the keys!" thrilled Dal Denby, exultantly.

There was a faint light there in the hallway, that came from a gas-jet on the first landing.

Dal brought out the keys, looked at them eagerly.

"The same keys!" he muttered, joyously. "Now—oh, if I can only get out of this neighborhood without being caught!"

For full ten minutes he waited, though. Then he opened the door softly, venturing to peer out.

There was no trace of the recent excitement. All on Ninth Avenue appeared to be moving along as usual.

"I'll chance it—I must!" decided the boy.

He stepped out, closing the door after him, then walked easily down the thoroughfare.

"But I don't dare to go home, either," he reflected. "Mulford will come in some time to-night, perhaps. It wouldn't be safe to try to get a wink of sleep to-night. I wonder if I'll ever sleep again?"

Then another thought:

"Why, it won't even be safe to go by the house! Mulford knows where to find me. He may be waiting there—with a policeman! Gracious! I suppose I've committed highway robbery, and can be sent to prison! Then what would become of my job at the ticker!"

CHAPTER V.

THE POWERFUL ENEMY ON DAL'S TRAIL.

Again Dal Denby's heart threatened to stop beating.

It was not the dread of going to prison that assailed him just then, but the far worse prospect of failing in the task that had been entrusted to him by Spofford.

"I'll take the L train and get downtown. A hotel will do me for to-night," he decided. "It's a mighty good thing to know that I've got a bit of money with me."

The boy was no spendthrift.

Though his pay was equal to little more than his expenses, Denby had some seven dollars in his pocket-book in one of his pockets.

More than that, tucked away in thin oil paper, were a ten-dollar and a twenty-dollar banknote that now rested securely between his shoe and the bottom of one of his socks.

He climbed the steps at the nearest station of the elevated railway.

A train whirled him down town. He walked briskly to one of the hotels, where he registered.

"Any valuables?" inquired the clerk, shoving an envelope across the desk.

"What's this for?" queried the boy.

"Put any valuables you've got in the envelope, seal it, and I put it away in the safe. No one but yourself can get the valuables again."

"Now, that is a great idea," murmured the boy to himself.

Out came the precious keys. Slip! they went into the envelope, which the clerk sealed securely and deposited in the safe.

"No more fuss about the keys," murmured Dal.

His mind thoroughly at rest now, he walked across to a chair near the window. There he sat looking out, enjoying the sense of rest and security for the night.

He went up to bed early, but lay awake, tossing, for a full hour.

His brain was so active that it seemed as if he would never again know the meaning of sleep.

"I wonder if a money king ever gets a night's rest?" he pondered. "If his head is as full of torments as mine is just now, I wouldn't swap places with a money-king!"

He tried, gropingly, to figure out the meaning of the day's great puzzle—what his instructions really meant?

Why should John Spofford have trusted him with this handling of a ten-million-dollar deal?

"Why does he trust such a stupendous thing to me? Why didn't he explain his purpose a little? I wonder if any one else in those offices of Spofford's has any idea what my job is, or what it means?"

In the midst of his perplexities, being healthy, Dal fell asleep.

He had forgotten to leave a call, but fortunately was wide awake before seven o'clock.

Getting the keys at the hotel office, and keeping his hand on them in his pocket always as he walked, Denby slipped out for breakfast.

He was in the office shortly after half-past eight, going directly to the little room in which that fateful ticker stood.

Shortly afterwards Tom Green hustled in.

"Hullo, Dal! What on earth got into you last night? And where did you spend the night anyway?"

"One question a week, Tom," laughed the boy. "And the first question isn't due for seven days yet."

"Oh, just as you please," uttered Green, gruffly. "Only you acted like a crazy man last night."

"I was crazy," Dal admitted, coolly.

"Well, I'm glad to see that you're a bit over it this morning," sighed Tom.

He was curious right up to the limit, but Dal was a queer chap, who, having refused to be questioned, was certain not to change his mind.

"Did Mulford come back to the house last night?" questioned young Denby.

"Not that I know of. But what have you and he got against each other, anyway?"

"Blessed if I know."

"Then why should Mulford get into your room, and why should you fight him, and why should you go out after him like a sky-rocket?"

"Only one question a week!" Dal laughingly reminded his friend.

"Oh, well, then," Tom assented, grudgingly. "Only if you land up in a bug-house, don't send for me to come and swear that you're as sane as other people!"

Clickety-click! click!

There was the stock-ticker, starting in with its day's budget of Wall Street, stock exchange and other news, telegraphically recorded.

Dal nervously pulled up a chair to the ticker, took in his hands the first bit of printed tape that came off, and gave all his attention to the task.

The stock market was opening with a slight rally. That much he learned from the first message.

But what did Dal care whether the market was weak, strong or out of existence altogether?

Nothing but "ozone" could chain his attention!

Tearing off the first yard of tape, he handed it to Tom to paste.

"Now, what on earth can this job mean?" grunted Tom

Green. "What good can it do to send this truck up to Dalton, when he has a ticker just like this right beside his desk?"

"I didn't think to ask Spofford," dodged Dal. Tom glanced shrewdly at his friend.

"Dal Denby, if you know the whole meaning of this stunt, and are keeping mum, you're sure the mummest kind of mummer that ever tackled such a job. And I half believe that you do know the meaning of this whole queer stunt."

"I wish I did," Dal sighed, truthfully.

For the next hour the ticker went on reeling off news of Wall Street and of the world's doings.

Then, suddenly, Dal held his breath and read on.

He had struck the name of John Spofford on the printed tape.

Breathlessly, Denby followed the message to the end.

The message stated that the stock market was slightly confused, owing to the absence of John Spofford from town, and the fact that no news of his whereabouts could be obtained.

At eleven o'clock the market was showing a weak tendency, owing to the unexplained disappearance of Spofford.

It was hinted that his disappearance was mysterious, and that bad consequences to the stock list might be looked for.

Twice more before the luncheon hour Dal struck the name of his employer on the tape from the ticker.

Yet not a word about "ozone" appeared.

At a minute or two after twelve the boys started out for lunch together.

Tom, who had gone a little ahead, darted back, pushing Dal backward.

"Thought I'd tell you," whispered Tom. "Mulford's out there on the sidewalk."

"Good!" thrilled Dal. "I want to see him."

"Not going to fight?"

"Bosh, no! I shall walk right by him—that's all."

Together the boys left the building.

Mulford turned swiftly to look at our hero.

The big fellow's face wore a scowl that was little less than murderous.

Dal, having seen him, walked straight by without another look.

"He didn't dare bring the police down here, on that old highway charge of his," the boy reflected. "But he'll be up to something else. I've got to keep my eyes open."

Luncheon over, and time to spare, the two youngsters sauntered slowly back toward the office.

They had just turned into Wall Street when Dal suddenly became the center of a lively moving picture.

A well-dressed but weakly-looking man of thirty stepped quickly up before the boy.

"You miserable little loafer!" hissed the stranger.

Lunge! His fist shot swiftly out for Denby's face.

Naturally, Dal dodged and hit quickly back.

Thump! His blow landed on the stranger's chest.

It wasn't much of a blow, but the effect was wonderful.

For the stranger turned around like a top, then staggered out into the road, falling in a heap.

"Shame! Quit that!" roared a voice.

In an instant Dal found himself struggling in the grasp of two strong men.

"The most cowardly blow I ever saw!"

"That boy ought to be lynched!"

"A wholly unprovoked assault that!"

Quickly enough a crowd gathered. A fight is the only thing that can make Wall Street take notice.

A policeman elbowed his way through the crowd.

"He assaulted me!" denounced the man who had first struck at Dal, pushing his way through the crowd. "Officer, I'll press complaint."

"I saw the boy hit him!"

"So did I."

Accuser and witnesses seemed to spring up from the ground.

The policeman had a husky hold on Dal Denby ere Tom Green had gotten over his first fit of gasping.

"Hold on, officer! That fellow struck my friend first!" Tom insisted.

But accuser and witnesses talked so loudly that the policeman half believed he had seen the whole affair.

"Off to jug with you, kid!" roared the officer. "I hope you get six months for that rough-house."

All of the witnesses, and there were at least five of them on the spot, were all well-dressed men.

They had the appearance of being "solid" business men.

Tom's protestations, added to Dal's, were of no avail.

The patrol wagon came in a hurry, Dal being pushed into it.

"The System—the money power back of Mulford and against John Spofford—this is one of their jobs!" groaned Dal, under his breath, as he was driven away under arrest.

He could see loyal Tom Green following swiftly on foot.

"It's anything to keep me away from the office," reflected our hero, wretchedly, nervously, as he rode toward the police station. "Locked up, what on earth can I do?"

Almost before he could realize it, the boy found himself standing before the station-house desk.

He was booked on the charge of assault.

By this time accuser and witnesses arrived.

All declared, most positively, that Dal had begun the assault, and that it had been wholly without cause.

"Liars, every one of you!" stormed Dal, under his breath.

"All of you ready to swear falsely against me in court, too. Every man of you a paid tool of the System. This is the way I am being followed up—anything to keep me from doing my sole duty!"

The boy could have sobbed as he realized the possible meaning of the afternoon away from the ticker.

The signal might come—he would be away from his post!

The orders that he was to carry out must be neglected.

There was Tom, standing in the background, trying to make his solitary word for his friend heard.

"If only I could turn this task of mine over to Tom!" Denby faltered. "But I can't do even that. Spofford told

Then Dal, following his instructions to the letter, sent me, particularly, not to trust a word of my business to anyone else."

"Lock the boy up in Cell 5," ordered the sergeant.

Cicketty-click! Click!

As Dal was led away it seemed to him as if he could hear the busy ticker taking up its afternoon's work.

Tricked away from his post of duty!

The thought made the boy writhe.

But there was no possible help for it.

He was in the stern grip of the unyielding law now!

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST HOPE OF SAFETY.

Click!

It wasn't the sound of the ticker this time, but the snapping of the automatic lock on the cell door.

Dal Denby was a secure guest in Number Five.

"I might as well be hanged!" half sobbed the boy, sinking down on the bench and burying his face in his hands.

Steps outside, and then:

"Say, Dal!"

Staunch Tom Green stood looking through the bars.

"What is it, old fellow?" Denby asked, brokenly.

"That's it!" Tom hailed cheerily. "What is it to be?"

"Eh?"

"Come closer."

Dal rose and obeyed.

"I don't see very far into this thing," Tom whispered, mindful of the watchful policeman who stood not far away. "But I can see through a hole in the fence any day! Your arrest was all a put-up job. It must have been something in connection with the office business."

"I suppose so," young Denby assented, disconsolately.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"What can I do?"

"If you're in this scrape on account of the office, why not send to the office to get you out of it?"

Dal gave a start, then hesitated.

To whom, at the office, could he send?

John Spofford was away, out of town—no one knew where.

No one at the office had any inkling of Dal's great trust. Then a hopeful thought came.

Drawing out a note-book and fountain pen, Dal wrote this message:

"Is it of any interest to you to know that I'm locked up, on a fake charge, at the _____ police station?"

This he signed and addressed.

"Take it to Mr. Dalton, Tom. I don't know what the answer will be."

With a whisk Tom was away.

Mr. Dalton was one of the managers at the Spofford offices.

But would Dalton know anything about the task entrusted to our hero?

Most likely not. If he failed to come to the young prisoner's aid, then Denby saw no way out of his present fix.

Time dragged, nearly an hour passing before there was another visitor to Cell 5.

This time it was a policeman, who unlocked the door.

"Come up to the desk," he gruffed, and Dal followed, with a thrill of hope.

Here three men stood before the desk.

One of them, Dal gathered, was a lawyer.

He was ordered to hold up his hand to be sworn, and did so.

"Released on bail," said the sergeant, briefly.

"Free to go?" Dal quivered.

"Go where you please," retorted the sergeant. "The lawyer will notify you when to be in court."

Mumbling his thanks, the boy started for the door.

Turning at the sidewalk, he waited for the lawyer to come down the steps.

"Did Mr. Dalton send you?" he inquired.

"I don't know," the man of law smiled, mysteriously. "I was sent—that's all I know."

Serves me right for asking any questions in Mr. Spofford's business," Dal told himself, as he hurried at top speed back to the office.

As he entered the ticker room, Tom Green leaped to his feet.

"Out, eh? Good, old fellow! Dalton hustled then?"

"Somebody did," Dal answered. "You know as much about it as I do. Gracious! What a lot of stuff," as he glanced at the basket beside the ticker.

That basket was fairly heaped up with tape that had been pouring forth since noon.

Hurriedly, yet thoroughly, Dal ran through it all.

Not a word about "ozone."

Heaving a sigh of relief, Denby dropped into his chair.

"Have I got to paste all that stuff now?" Tom demanded. "Yes, I suppose so."

By the time that Green had caught up with his task the closing of the Stock Exchange was reported on the tape.

"Through for another day!" Dal uttered, with a huge sigh of relief.

"Glad it don't take hold of me the way it does with you," commented Tom. "How old are you, Dal?"

"Seventeen."

"Whee! You've aged the past two days. You look at least seventy!"

Catching sight of himself in a mirror, Denby was almost willing to believe his chum.

"Where now?" asked Tom.

"I don't know."

"Not home, then?"

"Not just yet."

"Well, I'm off, then."

Tom hurried away.

Dal felt badly, for the moment, over having to lie to

his friend, but the instructions of Spofford left him little choice.

Two minutes after Green had left the office Denby departed.

He walked briskly back to the hotel where he had spent the night before.

"Lock these keys up for me again," he asked of the clerk.

Just as our hero was passing over the sealed envelope he half turned.

There stood Mulford, staring at him balefully.

Dal, trying to hide his alarm, turned away as if he had not seen the fellow, and walked to one of the chairs near the window.

"Having a pleasant time?" queried a sinister voice.

Mulford dropped into a chair beside the boy.

"Why don't you keep out of the way?" quivered young Denby.

"Can't," said Mulford, shortly.

"Can't? Won't, you mean."

"No, can't," insisted the fellow. "It's my job to keep on your track. And I'm not the only one on your trail, either!"

Looking around to make sure that no one else was within listening distance, the traitor to Spofford went on in a low tone:

"Kid, are you coming to your senses?"

"Don't talk puzzles!" snapped the boy.

"Well, then, I won't. Kid, this is the last hour in which you have any chance to be safe."

"More riddles!"

"Not by a blamed sight," retorted the big fellow, with energy. You remember that walk you took with me yesterday afternoon. I'm ready to take it again now."

"I'm not," came grimly from the boy.

"You'd better!"

"I won't."

"You can't make believe, now, that you believe it all a con game," Mulford hinted.

"You're a living con game yourself, Mulford!"

"Maybe you think your arrest this afternoon was a con game, too?"

"It was a dirty trick!"

"One of the lightest, easiest, plainest of the tricks that can be played against you," warned the big fellow, scowling straight into Dal's eyes.

But Dal looked back, unflinchingly.

"Mulford, you might as well clear out. You're wasting your time with me."

"I won't go until you get sense enough to take that walk with me down into Wall Street."

"Then, by crickets!" quivered Dal. "I'll ask the hotel people to run you out of here."

"Don't believe that would work."

"Wouldn't, eh?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Think you have a right to come in here and annoy guests all you want, do you?"

"I happen to be a guest here myself," grinned Mulford, meaningly. "I've registered and got a room in this house."

Despite himself, Dal found his coolness leaving him.

"Don't think it will do you any good to move over to another hotel, either," warned his foe. "I may not follow you there, but someone else will. Kid, can't you get sense enough to understand that the crowd I'm working for can send a whole army of strangers after you?"

"What if they do?" Dal demanded.

"Why, you're not safe on the streets! Men can be paid to do anything. Men are being paid, right now, to watch you. You can't leave this hotel and be safe, without I go with you. And I'll go to only one place with you—the same place I tried to take you yesterday. But I can tell you this much, Denby: If you'll go with me and talk right up, honest, the same money offer is open to you, and you'll get it. Now, which is the best thing to do?"

"To sell out Spofford—or what?" Dal insisted.

"Well, the other thing is to be fixed for good and all. Don't be fool enough to think you can go on in this way when dangerous folks are after you. You can be rich if you want to. Or, well, you can be a wreck! You saw how easily you could be jugged this afternoon."

"And you know how easily I got out again," Dal boasted.

"Oh, that was simply because you were only arrested. But could you get out again if someone shut the life right out of your body?"

"So that's the plan now, is it?" Dal demanded, feeling more uncomfortable than he dared show.

"You'll lose your life if it has to be done—yes," Mulford assured him in a snarling voice.

"And that's the only way you can get the best of me," the boy vaunted.

"Then it's 'no' to me?" snarled Mulford, rising, but bending over and gazing searchingly, brutally into the boy's eyes.

"It's 'no,'" Dal declared, firmly.

"I believe you mean it."

"I do."

"Or think you do."

"Good-bye, Mulford. Clear out! Go take a walk! Try the fresh air cure!"

"Your last chance of safety is gone now!" growled that brutish voice in Dal Denby's ear. "I'm through. Others take my place. You'll be a fool to the end—which ain't far off."

Mulford's heavy tread sounded going across the floor of the hotel office.

Despite himself, Dal felt a dazed sort of dread.

After a couple of minutes he looked around.

Mulford was nowhere in sight.

Going over to the news-stand, Denby bought a paper, returned to his window seat to go through the motions of reading it.

It was the Wall Street edition of an evening paper that he had.

In the first column of the first page he came upon an article which dealt with the general uneasiness of specu-

lators and investors as to the standing of General Traction stock.

Dal read it through, but without his mind fixed upon it. This was the stock that his secret instructions covered.

But he could make nothing of the article. It was all "Greek" to him.

"I can't fix my mind on anything," he muttered, disgustedly.

As he rose and turned, he caught two men looking at him fixedly.

There was nothing in their general appearance to make them look different from other hotel guests.

Yet the peculiar gaze of their eyes made the boy shudder slightly.

"Some of the other people Mulford referred to, I suppose," uttered the boy, uneasily. "Oh, dear, I wonder what the whole game means?"

Calling for his key, he went to his room, turned the key in the lock and lay down for a nap.

He was so tired that he soon fell asleep.

It was the sleep of exhaustion that came to him.

When Dal awoke it was broad daylight again.

Looking at his watch, he found it to be after five o'clock. "Glad I got that sleep," he murmured, as he rose, drowsily. "I'd have been afraid to lie down if I'd supposed that I'd sleep so long. Whatever the plan of Mulford's crew may be, it's certain that they don't plan to murder me here in the hotel. They've had all night long to break into my room and turn the trick!"

It was so early that there was nothing to do but go down to the office, get a morning paper and turn through the news.

Two columns about the market uncertainty over General Traction.

The public was represented as being panicky over the situation.

Small buyers of stocks knew not which way to turn.

John Spofford had promised, recently, that soon there would be decided developments in General Traction.

Yet now he had disappeared entirely, with no word coming from him as to the fate of this stock.

"Old Spofford is looking out for the honest part of the buying public, as he always does," Dal guessed. "The System has some move of its own afloat, but is scared to death over what Spofford will do. And it's all up to me to carry out what he wants to do when the time comes. The System has me spotted, and is after me. Oh, if I could only guess what's slated to happen to me!"

On this point Dal was not destined to remain long in doubt.

CHAPTER VII.

"OZONE!"

Clinketty-click! Click!

For an hour or more the office ticker had been going

steadily, recording everything that could be of interest to men in the money world.

Not once had Dal's eyes wandered from the tape.

Nothing that he had looked for had come out.

He did not expect that it would, yet come it must, some time, and it would never do to be caught napping.

Over at the desk Tom Green faithfully cut up the tape into proper lengths, pasting them on sheets of paper, while every few minutes an office boy came in and took the sheets off to Mr. Dalton.

It was monotonous work, but Tom did not object, for it was easy, and required no thought.

With Dal it was different.

He was under the strongest tension all the time.

"Hullo! What's the excitement?" called Tom, looking up.

"Is there any?" Dal asked, listlessly.

"Don't you hear the rumpus?"

Dal hardly listened, but to his ears there came the sound of hurrying feet in the offices outside.

Then came excited voices.

"I've got to find out," vented Tom, making a leap for the door.

Only a few moments was Green absent in the outer offices.

Then he came back, breathless.

"Dal, I reckon we've got to fade away from here! No time to be lost, either!"

"What's wrong?"

"Fire—that's what's wrong!" cried Tom.

"Where is it?"

"In this very building!"

"What part?"

"Upper story!"

"Oh, fire travels up faster than it does down, I've heard," Dal replied, listlessly. "No need to rush out of here. Besides, we've work to do."

"Work? Hang it all, Dal Denby, do you want to be roasted alive. I tell you this is a real fire—a big fire! There! Do you hear the fire apparatus in the street?"

The clangor coming up to their ears from the street, pierced by the shrill whistles from the fire engines, was deafening.

"I tell you," insisted Tom, "we've got to get out. Everyone else is hustling. Look here!"

Tom threw open the outer door, revealing an office that was empty save for two or three clerks who were hustling to get piles of books together before decamping.

"Five minutes more, and it may be too late for us to get out of here!" quivered Tom.

"Run along, then!"

"And you?"

"I stay here," Dal replied, quietly.

"Are you crazy?" gasped Tom.

"No; but I'm on duty. I'm not going to quit. The fire department is charged with the job of putting out the fire. I stick to my post!"

"But don't you understand?" pleaded Green, anxiously. "You'll throw away your life by staying here!"

"I'd as soon do that as forget what I'm here for," Dal spoke, with quiet stubbornness.

Then, suddenly, he thought of the vault room.

That contained his precious power of attorney—his written instructions.

"The vault room?" he demanded of the excited Tom. "Has anyone gone up there?"

"Yes; Dalton went up with about twenty of the clerks. They're out again with everything that Dalton wanted most to save. They went down the back way. Dal, in less than fifteen minutes we'll be buried in the wreck of the building!"

"You won't," Dal retorted, "if you skip right now."

"But hang it all, old fellow, I can't run off and leave you here!"

"You'll have to—or stay with me!"

Tom Green looked the very picture of desperate anxiety. He looked at Dal with flushed face and tears in his eyes.

"Confound it, Dal, old chap, I can't leave you here."

"I can't go yet."

"Then I'll stay!" choked Tom.

Clicketty-click! Click! The tape was unreeling, coming off covered by printed words.

Dal chained his gaze to the narrow strip of paper between his fingers.

"Do you really have to stay here, old fellow?" Tom insisted.

"Yes."

"Then I have to stay, too."

"Why?"

"My work goes with yours."

Dal remembered Mr. Spofford's orders that Tom should go with him to the broker's when the order came.

"Yes," young Denby admitted, "I guess it is your job to stay—according to the orders I got."

"Shall I begin to paste the tape, then?" sighed Tom, as he shuffled across to his desk and sat down.

"Oh, I guess there's no hurry about that, since Dalton has skipped out of the building."

Tom therefore moved across to one of the front windows. He threw it up, leaned out and peered out into the street.

"Gracious! One, two, three—eight engines below, Dal, and hose carts and ladder trucks to beat four dollars! There must be two dozen lines of hose into the building. And here comes the water tower! Smell the smoke?"

"Yes," Dal assented.

"Gracious! They'll never save this building, Dal."

"I hope they do."

"No; it's a fire-trap; and we're rats in the trap," choked Tom.

"Oh, by the way, old fellow!"

"Well?" asked Tom.

"I wish you would run up to the vault room and see how things are going up there."

Tom went off on a fast trot.

Clicketty-click! Click!

Still on the hunt for that magic word—"ozone"!

"It's hot as a furnace up there!" Tom sputtered, as he darted back into the room. The firemen are hustling, but they can't save the top of the building. I don't believe they'll save any part of it!"

"Did you get as far as the vault room door?"

"Yes."

"It wasn't too hot or smoky to get to the door?"

"No, but it soon will be."

"Then there may yet be time for us to do what we're here to do!" uttered Dal, his eyes dancing and his color rising.

"See here, old fellow, if you don't finish what you're up to, do you mean to stay here and go down in the blazing ruins of this fire-trap?"

"Yes," Denby answered, almost in a whisper.

"Oh, good Lord!" cried Tom, in a voice hoarse with terror.

"You can skip whenever you want, old fellow," Dal urged.

"And leave you here alone, Dal Denby?" sputtered Green. "I wouldn't know how to do it!"

There is a vast difference between being afraid and being a coward. Tom, in his own way, was proving that difference.

But he walked to the window, threw it higher up and watched, with panicky looks, the doings in the street below.

There was the unceasing throb of the engines, the tooting of whistles, the hoarse bawling of orders to firemen by battalion chiefs, the hiss of cold water on hot stone and metal and blazing wood.

"Ugh! Huh-huh!" coughed Tom.

"Better close the window, Tom. It lets in smoke enough to stifle us."

With trembling hands Tom shut down the window sash. At that same time Dal gave a start on his own account.

For now, on the tape passing through his fingers, he read: "A man close to John Spofford—"

There the tape stopped.

Dal groaned with impatience as he waited for the ticker to resume printing.

Clicketty-click! clicketty-click!

The tape had begun to move again.

"—states that Spofford's absence from the city does not mean—"

Was that infernal ticker bewitched?

What could be holding it back?

Cold sweat stood out now all over Dal Denby's body.

"It's the message coming!" he thrilled. "Oh, what on earth is holding this stupid machine back?"

In the instant after the conviction came to him that this was the important message of all there flashed upon him the meaning of the fire.

"It's all the work of that crowd behind Mulford!" shot through the boy's brain as he held his gaze to the now motionless tape. "Mulford knew I had the key to the vault room. His gang—the System or whatever gang it is—knew that with the vault room in ashes I could not do the thing that I was ordered to do. This fire is Mulford's

work! Oh, why wasn't he bounced when there was still time?"

Clinketty-click.

"—that there is any thing in his absence of significance to the stock market. Spofford is in the country, nearby, filling up his system with a superior brand of ozone."

"Ozone!" The key-word.

"Hurrah!" Dal fairly shouted.

"Eh? What's that?" demanded Tom Green, looking stupidly on.

"Oh, I felt good—that was all," Dal replied.

"Denby, get a grip on yourself," implored Green, darting forward and shaking his chum by the arm. "Are you going crazy here in the heat, the smoke and the danger?"

"It's all right, Tom," quivered the other boy, shaking off his friend's clutch. "Lemme alone."

"But—"

"Shut up!"

"Dal! You—."

"Shut up! Take that order as coming from Spofford himself!"

Click-click-click!

"Wabash preferred—" he read, and then dropped the tape as if it had burned him.

The end of the "ozone" message had come—of the first message, at least.

And now there was swift, jumping work to be done.

"Come on, Tom, old fellow!" yelled Dal, darting out of the ticker room, and his voice coming back vibrantly after him.

"Where to?" blared Green, rushing in pursuit.

"Up stairs!"

"What?"

"Two flights!"

"To the—vault room!"

"All right! Go it!" cheered Tom. "I hope we can get through."

Dal flew up the two flights of stairs, despite the smoke, as if he had weighed no more than a feather.

He brought up with a bang against the iron door of the vault room.

"It's locked again!" he discovered.

"Of course," nodded practical Tom. "That's to keep the fire and the draft out, if possible."

Dal's key was in the lock. He shot the bolt back.

There was yet the combination lock to be worked. He remembered the word well, and started to turn.

Twist! The great iron door swung open, pushed by the two boys together.

"Gracious! It's hot in here!" sputtered Tom, as they dashed into the room.

It was, indeed, almost as warm as a bake oven.

The interior of the vault room looked as if a cyclone had struck it.

Dalton and his crew of clerks had searched swiftly, recklessly, for the books and papers that they wanted.

Safes and strong boxes were standing open, and many of them lying on their sides.

The floor was littered with the debris of business papers and books that had been left behind.

In the midst of all this confusion stood a stock ticker, its basket full of tape, for John Spofford, always close to the ticker when in town, had had one even put in the vault room, where he often spent an hour.

"Look at that roof! It's going to cave in!" quivered Tom, pointing up to where the smoke was slowly curling downward through the ceiling.

"It'll hold for five minutes, anyway," Dal predicted.

"Get out of here as quick as you can, anyway!"

"Oh, don't be afraid," muttered Dal, dryly.

In that supreme moment he was not thinking of peril. His eyes searched in the confusion and the smoke for that particular green safe.

Tom watched him as if in a dream—a nightmare—for Tom Green hardly dared hope that they could reach the street now.

Better would it have been had Tom watched the stairway.

For up the steps, crawling stealthily in their wake, his eyes a-glitter with the deadliest purpose that can come to man, was Mulford!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST CRACK OF DOOM!

"There it is!" quivered Dal, leaping forward through the smoke.

He had spotted the green safe, overturned on its side.

Like a flash he was down on his knees, applying the key.

He trembled, for he feared to find, in this critical second, that the key might not work.

Tom's eye, in that instant, turned upon a crowbar that lay upon the floor.

"It may come in handy, to dig our way out of wreckage," muttered practical Tom.

He possessed himself of the heavy iron bar while Dal was fitting the key in the lock.

The door of the little safe swung open.

There were many papers there, but our hero searched for only one.

He found it—a bulky envelope labelled:

"Power of attorney for Dalbert Denby, with instructions."

The envelope was sealed. Everything must be there all right, then.

Thrusting the bulky envelope in an inner jacket pocket, Dal leaped to his feet.

"I've got it," he announced. "Now to get out!"

"Down two flights?"

"No—out of the building, now!"

"Glory!" quivered Green. "That's the talk!"

Clickety-click! click-click-click!

Crash!

Overhead, the ceiling was giving way before the ravages of the fire.

Wooden beams and iron girders settled, then came slowly, crashingly through.

Dense clouds of smoke, shooting tongues of flame, invaded the vault room from above.

Tom heard the crack of doom.

Dal heard the ticker start—sprang to it.

"There isn't a second to be lost!" Tom shouted.

"It'll take only a moment to find what's coming on the tape," Denby retorted, as he sprang to the busy telegraph instrument, seizing up the tape basket in his intense excitement.

Tom stood stock still, panting, terrified—fully convinced that Dal Denby had gone hopelessly crazy!

Outside, Mulford got closer to the door, striving to hide his body from the view of the boys.

"A letter received by a friend in this city," Dal read slowly, absorbedly, "brings the news from John Spofford—"

"This is for me!" Dal Denby thrilled.

"Get out of here—fly!" shrieked Green.

—"that already ozone in the country is sending his pulse—"

There, of all places, the tape had to stop again, the ticker silent, while Death fairly licked its tongue over the two imperilled boys.

"Get out of here, or I'll kick you down the stairs!" the other boy roared.

"Don't. That vital, fateful word—it's coming now!" trembled fascinated Dal.

"So's death!" shrieked Tom Green, leaping forward.

Darting to the iron door, murderous Mulford seized the handle to pull it shut and bolt the boys in with their fiery doom!

—"up!" finished the ticker.

"Up! That's the order to buy!" quivered Dal. "Now, I have my full orders!"

His mind came instantly back to the problem of escape from the doom that now seemed almost certain, even without the devilish work of Mulford.

It was Tom who got the first inkling of treachery at hand.

He saw the iron door swinging shut, and leaped forward, reaching it at a single bound.

He thrust the crowbar in just the crack of space that was left between door and iron jamb.

It did not yield—he felt the pull against him and his bar.

"Dal—there's some fiend trying to fasten us in here!"

"Mulford, then!" flashed Denby, as he added his grip and weight to the bar.

Thrusting the iron bar through a few more inches, they got great leverage against the jamb.

"Push—hard!" ordered Dal.

Using all the leverage they had, Dal and Tom forced the door open swiftly, despite the frantic pull of Mulford.

As the door crashed wide open, Mulford pitched headlong into the room, falling upon his face.

"Come along!" vibrated Green. "Never mind that carnion!"

"We can't let him burn to death," objected Dal, halting when half way down stairs.

But, as he turned, he saw Mulford dragging himself out of the smoke-filled room above.

"It's all right!" shouted Dal. "Go ahead. He's alive!"

Tom darted down the stairs, not once thinking of dropping the crowbar, which he might need again should Mulford overtake them.

"Back to the offices?" appealed Tom, as he led the way down the stairs.

"No—out!"

"The back way?"

"It's the only safe way out."

For three stories down the boys fought against suffocation and the temptation to lie down for a rest and a breath.

"Can't—get—much further!" gasped Tom.

"Got—to!" flashed back resolute Dal.

Intent as he had been on staying when duty demanded it, Dal was now all for the next imperative duty of getting out of the building alive.

At last they stumbled down to where the air was freer.

They were met by the firemen coming up.

First came two men looking for victims of the fire.

Back of them came a dozen others dragging two lengths of hose.

"You the last ones out, boys?" demanded a fire department lieutenant.

"One more man above," Dal gasped, almost inaudibly.

"On this same set of stairs?"

Dal nodded. He could not speak now.

"Here, I'll help you down," offered one of the firemen, giving a steady hand to Denby's arm.

Another fireman had turned and was helping Tom.

More dead than alive, the boys reached the back street, behind the building.

There was space here, and air, for the fire-lines shut back the crowd that was surging beyond.

"Can you go by yourselves now?" demanded Dal's attendant.

The boy nodded, turning his face toward the nearest corner.

He and Tom were still tottering somewhat weakly when they came to the fire-lines.

"Way here!" shouted a policeman, as Denby and his friend battled to get through the crowd. "Don't suffocate these boys."

The policeman himself forced a way through the throng, remarking:

"Guess I'd better call an ambulance for you two."

"No—all right!" Dal assured the officer, chokingly.

The policeman however, looked at his two charges doubtfully as he got them through to the edge of the crowd.

"Better go to the hospital and get that smoke pumped out, kids," the bluecoat insisted.

"No!"

A cab was standing near by.

To that Dal hurried, swaying, toppling in on the seat. Tom staggered in behind him.

"Where to?" demanded the driver, showing his face at the door.

"Graham & Graham, Wall Street—quick!"

Slam! The cab door was shut, the horse trotting briskly off.

Dal leaned toward one open window, Tom at the other.

There they remained, drinking in the good, smoke-free air until their destination was reached.

Dal had the money ready for the driver. He handed it out before he alighted.

"I never knew how good real air tasted before," grunted Tom, as they went into the building on the ground floor of which were the Graham offices.

"I want to see Mr. Phillip Graham," panted Dal, as a clerk came toward them in the outer office of the brokerage firm.

"Think he'll see you?" jeered the clerk, eyeing Dal's very ordinary and smoke-scented clothes.

"Tell him I come from John Spofford, and he will," Dal returned, coolly.

"From John Spofford?" uttered the clerk, unbelievingly. "Then you'd better give me a card."

"I haven't one. But I can convince Mr. Graham, all right,"

"Perhaps you can," retorted the clerk, doubtfully. "But you can't convince me."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," Dal assured the clerk, coolly. "I don't care anything about convincing you. I can show Mr. Graham real credentials from John Spofford."

"Let me see them," ordered the clerk.

"What?" retorted Dal, crisply. "Show such papers to an eight-dollar clerk?"

"Then I don't take your message to Mr. Graham."

"If you don't, someone else will, and I don't believe you'll last long around here after that. Just tell Mr. Graham that there's a young man here from Spofford, and see what he says."

"I know that you'll get yourself in an awful pickle, if you don't," volunteered Tom.

Without another word the clerk turned on his heel, walking toward an inner office.

He was back again soon.

"Mr. Graham says you can come in," he announced.

Dal followed without a word, Tom keeping at his heels, until Dal turned to whisper:

"Tom, I don't know—"

"Want me to keep out? All right," Green returned, cheerily.

He went back to the outer office to seat himself, while Dal Denby stepped into an inner office.

"Are you from Spofford?" asked a pleasant-faced, elderly man seated before a big desk.

"Yes, sir, and I have my introduction with me," Dal replied.

Mr. Graham took the power of attorney, glanced it over, then whistled in sheer amazement.

"Why, bless me, I can't believe it!" gasped the old broker.

"Neither could I, when I first heard about it," Dal smiled back at him. "But I got it into my head by degrees."

"You're empowered to give buying and selling orders for one hundred thousand shares of General Traction stock? Why, that means a deal of somewhere around ten million dollars!"

"I believe that's the figure," Dal went on, coolly.

"This whole paper is made out in Spofford's writing, too—there can't be any doubt about its genuineness," went on the broker, scanning the sheet. "But there's just one difficulty."

"Only one, sir?" Dal queried, with a roguish smile.

"Only one, boy. I don't really know that you are Dalbert Denby."

"Then, if you will get any of Spofford's people here, they'll have to identify me, for they all know me."

"I shall have to do that—certainly," gasped the banker, rising. "In the meantime, make yourself comfortable, Mr. Denby."

Dal retired to a corner of the room, taking out the other papers that the envelope contained.

These papers gave him his instructions in detail, either for buying or selling Traction.

Those that related to selling, the boy put back in his pocket, then glanced over the orders for buying.

So absorbed was he that fifteen minutes passed without his looking up.

"It's all right, Mr. Denby," he heard the broker say. I had Mr. Dalton come here and look in. He identified you."

"You didn't tell him what business I was here on?" Dal asked, quickly.

"Oh, no," smiled the broker. "I've been doing business for Spofford too long not to know better than that. Now, then, Mr. Denby, have you any orders?"

"Yes, sir. I want you to buy a block of Traction for Spofford. I want you to buy twenty-five hundred shares of Traction for a starter. Divide the order up among six brokers in New York, two in Boston, one in Philadelphia and one in Chicago. Get the wires busy, please."

"Sit down at this desk, Mr. Denby, and make out the order, please," requested Mr. Graham, placing an order blank and pen and ink before the boy who held John Spofford's power of attorney.

Dal wrote rapidly. After the great strain he had been under swift action brought relief.

He finished the order, signed it, and turned it over to the broker.

"Mr. Graham, you'll take great care, of course, that it is kept quiet that Mr. Spofford is behind all the buying that's going to be done?"

"Most certainly. Mr. Denby, do you wish to leave a list giving a general indication of the buying or selling that's to be done?"

"No, sir. No such list can be made out at present."

Truth to tell, Dal had in his pocket, at that moment, a list giving explicit orders.

But he was following instructions in denying the fact.

"And now, where shall we find you, Mr. Denby, since Spofford's offices are in the hands of the fire fiend?"

"Why, bless me if I know," Dal uttered. "I shall have to see Mr. Dalton."

"Then you'll be wherever he is, during business hours?"

"Probably, sir. Good morning, Mr. Graham."

"One moment, please."

The broker touched a bell, which summoned the same clerk who had sneered at Dal.

"Jimson, Mr. Denby is to be shown in here at once whenever he calls," instructed the broker.

"Very good, sir," responded the clerk, who then followed Dal to the outer office.

"Aren't you glad, son, that you didn't get any fresher than you were?" Dal demanded, grinningly.

"No offence, I hope," stammered Jimson, turning very red.

"Oh, none whatever," Dal replied, easily. "Well, Tom, we're ready to be off now."

"And where to now?" Green asked, as he rose quickly.

"To our place of business,—wherever that is."

"The Lord only knows," grunted Green.

Dal breathed the air with huge relish as he stepped out into Wall Street.

He was at last a free man again—the great, crushing strain and responsibility about over with—so he thought!

CHAPTER IX.

DAL DENBY, "THE GREATEST BOY IN WALL STREET."

Before one o'clock in the afternoon there was wild excitement on the "Street."

Something was doing in General Traction—but not even the oldest and wisest heads on the Stock Exchange could guess what was really astir.

Bull buying had started in, driving up the price of Traction.

Then the bears had jumped into the market, sending down the price a trifle.

Well enough Dal knew where this resolute bear movement came from—from the enemies of Spofford in the money world—the same enemies who had undoubtedly been behind the attempts to keep Dal from following his orders.

Further big buying orders, signed with Dal's name, had put the price up again.

Down, a little, it came. Then up again it travelled, under the push imparted by a further buying order from Dal Denby.

A great bull and bear duel was on in Wall Street—the dullest wit in the money world realized that.

Yet all the smaller operators in the market became flurried.

Some dashed madly to cover, others plunged in wildly for speculation on one side or the other of what promised

to be a lively speculative season—the liveliest, in fact, in some years.

Dal sat snugly ensconced in a private office, one of a suite of two rooms, and these two, in turn, being a part of a general office of some dozen rooms.

For as great an operator in the money world as John Spofford did not attempt to get along with one business address.

He had held this present suite of offices, in a building right on Wall Street, for just such an emergency as the morning's fire.

Dal had found Mr. Dalton, and had handed to him a slip that he had found in with his general instructions.

"I guess you're going to be the star here, for a few days anyway," smiled Mr. Dalton, when he had read Spofford's order, addressed to himself.

So here Dal was established, with Tom Green lounging in the outer room.

In the outer room, also, was a big safe, in which Dal's secret orders from Spofford could be kept at night.

By day two detectives from a well-known agency guarded that safe and the suite. At night the guard was to be increased to three men.

Here, too, Dal and Tom were to sleep until the excitement was over.

Along with his instructions, Dal Denby had the privilege of drawing upon Spofford's cashier for such funds as he might need for telegraphing or other purposes.

"I'm a big boy in Wall Street, all right," Dal smiled, as he leaned back in his comfortable chair before the great desk, after having sent off the fourth buying order.

By two o'clock Tom came in, glowing, to announce:

"There's a reporter outside who wants to see Mr. Denby."

"Tell him I'm too busy to see anyone," Dal rejoined, briefly.

Tom departed, but was quickly back, quivering with excitement.

"There's three more reporters, now, and the whole four of 'em insist on seeing you."

"Tell 'em I can't see 'em—won't!" crisped Dal.

Tom departed on his errand, a hopeless one apparently, for soon there were a dozen newspaper men, all clamoring to see the youngster who had set Wall Street and the money markets of the entire country agog.

"Tell them I'm sorry, but I simply can't see 'em," Dal insisted. "If that won't work, then ask the detectives to clear the office—some way."

It worked only partly. The reporters ceased insisting on an interview, but sat quietly outside, waiting for our hero to change his mind.

"No one would have known that I was doing this, if Mr. Spofford's opponents hadn't tipped the reporters," Dal mused. "Now, why did they do that? Did they think I'd be green enough to let reporters pump me dry for their benefit?"

Just before three o'clock, the "bear" enemies of Spofford, by spending a good deal of money, succeeded in growling down the price of Traction once more.

out a big buying order at the price that the bears had brought about.

Three o'clock came. By the help of this last big buying order the price of Traction closed at a bull figure.

Dal leaned back with a happy sigh.

So far he had succeeded in following his orders to the letter, and in doing what John Spofford plainly wanted.

Now, Tom Green came in with a packet of Wall Street extras of the afternoon newspapers.

Dal, glancing at these pages, found that he had suddenly become famous.

He was referred to as a boy, hitherto unknown, but reputed to have been a junior clerk of Spofford's.

He was referred to as being, for the hour, "the greatest boy in Wall Street."

"Say, ain't that great?" glowed honest Tom.

"Oh, I don't know," mumbled Dal.

"But you are the greatest fellow around here just now," persisted Tom, curiously.

If he was waiting for Dal to say something that would throw light, Green was bound to be disappointed.

"I wish I could guess what the whole racket is, anyway," Tom hinted.

Dal was silent. He couldn't "talk," even to his best friend.

Besides, truth to tell, our hero was enjoying his sudden fame. He would hardly have cared to admit that, outside of his cast-iron instructions, he had no more idea than Tom as to what "the racket" really was.

Tom went out, but was soon back again.

"There's another caller to see you now—one who won't be put off."

"Then put him out," grinned Dal.

"That's just the trouble. It ain't a him, it's a her," Tom explained.

"Eh?"

"Just a slip of a girl, about sixteen or seventeen."

"What?"

"And a peach for looks," Tom went on, impressively.

"Oh!"

"She's been crying, I think," Tom confided. "And she looks white and scared to death, and her voice trembles when she talks."

"You're sure getting my curiosity up," Dal admitted. "I guess you can let her come in."

"All right."

"And, Tom—"

"After you have shown her in here—"

"Yes?"

"Then you get out!"

Good-natured though he was, Green banged the door slightly as he went out.

The door opened again, and then in came a young woman who certainly deserved all that Tom had said about her looks.

Dal looked up. The next instant he got up, advanced, and bowed as well as he knew how.

"Let me offer you this chair," he begged, placing one

opposite his own. "Now, please feel quite at your ease, Miss—"

He looked inquiringly, eagerly, at his pretty visitor.

CHAPTER X.

TEN MILLIONS SPENT ON THE BULL MARKET.

"My name is Faith Garner," she replied.

"Name's as pretty as the girl," thought Dal.

"You will think me very silly," she went on, nervously.

"I don't and I can't think that, Denby protested.

"Although you seem to be so very young to be in charge in an office like this," Faith Garner went on, quickly, "I can understand how much your time is taken up. I will state my business very quickly."

"The market has closed for the day," Dal replied.

"Then you have more leisure?"

"Yes."

"Still, I will be brief, and not waste your time. It is on my father's account that I have come."

"Ah!"

"My father is Major Garner, of the Army, retired," went on the girl. "He is at the Astor House now, very ill with heart trouble. The doctor is with him. My father's heart has troubled him for some time, but this afternoon's papers have brought the trouble on in a much worse shape. It seems, Mr. Denby, that my father has been caught speculating in General Traction stock."

"Speculating on a margin?" asked Dal.

"On a margin, of course."

"That's a very bad thing to do just now, Miss Garner. And, if you came to me for information, that really is all I can tell you."

"I was in hopes—in hopes—" stumbled the girl.

"That I could tell you more about the way the market is going?"

"That was my hope in coming here," admitted the girl, her color rising and making her look so much prettier that Dal almost lost his head.

"Oh, Miss Garner, how very little you know of Wall Street, if you thought I could give you such information. Why, there are men in another office on Wall Street who would no doubt pay a million dollars for the same information that you seek."

"But my father would not use it to your disadvantage," the girl pleaded, her great, big, sorrowful eyes turned full upon him. "He is an honest man. Army officers are well trained in keeping their word. And I would not breathe a word of such information!"

"I can't tell you how sorry I am, Miss Garner," Dal replied, with an effort.

Then, like a flash, he felt a sudden stiffening of the backbone.

The thought had jumped quickly into his mind that, very likely, this delightfully pretty girl with the pleading

eyes was some clever young woman sent to him by Spofford's money-king enemies.

He must be on his guard against even the faintest trace of misplaced, wasted sympathy.

"It won't do any harm, though, to seem sympathetic at all events," the boy told himself, as he still kept his eyes on the girl.

"If you could give me just the smallest hint," she suggested, eagerly, "as to whether my father should keep his margined stock for a rise?"

"I am sorry that it is impossible for me to say anything," Dal replied, gently.

"Not even a hint? For the doctor has warned me that a crash that ruins my poor father will also kill him, and at once! I should not have left him—should not be here now—had I not believed that a visit to you might be the means of saving his life.

"Can't we put it another way," she persisted, eagerly. "Do you think papa ought to sell out at once, saving what little of his margin he can?"

"It is impossible for me to say, Miss Garner."

"Or should he hold on and sell at the next rise?"

"I don't know."

"Would it be safe for him to hold on until the stock goes to a hundred and ten?"

"But what if a bear movement were to wipe him out before the stock got to that figure?"

Miss Garner seemed to be thinking hard.

"It is really impossible—quite impossible for me to tell you anything at all," Dal went on gently. "It would be a breach of confidence if I were to tell you even why I am not at liberty to speak."

"Then there is nothing that you can do to help us in our little troubles?" asked Faith Garner, rising.

"Nothing; and you will never realize how fearfully sorry I am to have to answer you that way."

Faith held out her hand promptly, steadily. Dal gave her his hand, feeling very awkward as he did so, and realizing painfully how dingy his clothing seemed beside her sweet, chaste raiment.

"Good-bye, Mr. Denby—and thank you so much, even if you couldn't be of service to us. I shall not forget you."

She was gone, leaving behind her a faint scent of perfume that lingered deliciously in the room.

"Thank me 'so much' for me giving her the marble heart—for passing her the icy, icy ice-pitcher?" quivered Dal, as he dropped down into his chair again. "Now, what on earth could she mean by that? Was she pleased because I seemed really sorry that I couldn't help her? Well, I didn't have to try hard in order to seem sorry. I am sorry for her—unless she's some sharp-witted girl that Mr. Spofford's enemies sent around to me. If she's an adventuress, though—the System or whoever our foes are, are welcome to all the news she got out of me!"

"What's to do?" asked Tom, poking his head in a few minutes later.

"Nothing the rest of the day. We've got to sleep here

to-night, under guard of the detectives—got to sleep on these office sofas."

"So we won't be kidnapped as money kings in disguise?" grinned Tom.

"Make your own guesses—don't search me," Dal retorted.

"And as to that peach—"

"If you mean Miss Garner," bristled Dal, "don't talk about her with that rude, coarse grin on your face."

"Oh!" said Tom, in a tone that might have meant anything.

"I'm going out now for a little air," Dal went on. "When I come back you take a turn out doors."

"Think it's safe?" demanded Tom, his eyes twinkling.

"Why?"

"Oh, with these detectives around a fellow gets to think he's something rather precious—something that ought not to be risked in the mixed crowd of Wall Street."

"We're safe enough, anyway, on crowded Wall Street," hazarded Dal. "I'm going only as far as Broadway and back, once or twice. I'll soon be back."

"Take care of yourself, then. And if you see the peach—"

"Tom, if you don't learn better manners, I'll teach you—with my fist!"

Tom ducked. Dal got out.

He mingled in the crowded, hustling, throng of the "Street" without attracting any attention. His name was on everybody's lips this afternoon, but his face was still unknown.

The crowd was less dense as he got nearer to Broadway.

Suddenly he felt a violent push from behind that threw him some five or six feet forward.

Bang!

Dal wheeled, and as he did so, Faith Garner, pallid as a ghost, fell forward into his arms.

Just at her heels, on the sidewalk, lay a heavy paving block.

"Get away—quick!" she pleaded, frantically, pushing him still further up the street.

Then Dal wheeled, drawing her around at his side and tucking her hand through his arm.

"Walk fast—you may not be out of danger yet," she faltered.

"Why, what happened, Miss Garner?" he queried, wonderingly.

"Oh, it was dreadful, but someone tried to kill you!" she half sobbed.

"Kill me?"

"You saw that great paving block that fell just behind me?"

"Yes, yes!"

"I had just been to—to the office of papa's broker," Faith replied, as she still forced him to walk rapidly on. "I came out of that office and fell in just behind you. I was walking along, looking up at the windows, for an address that I wanted, Mr. Denby. As I looked, I saw a man lean out of a window high up. He had that paving block in his

hand, and poised it just over your head. I saw him let go—saw the block coming down, and I pushed you out of the way just in time, I guess."

"Jupiter!" gasped Dal.

"I suppose you must have enemies, Mr. Denby—just now."

"It's plain that I have," he smiled grimly.

"But how should an enemy know that you were coming up the street just now?"

"That's one of the uses that telephones can be put to, Miss Garner. But I can't get over the very plain fact that I owe my life to you, Miss Garner. It makes me feel bad when I think how shabbily I had to treat you."

"Oh, don't think about that," the girl rejoined, brightly. "I think I understand you perfectly, Mr. Denby."

That was a poser for Dal, but he turned off his confusion by asking:

"Do you mind telling me where you are heading for now, Miss Garner?"

"For the hotel. I want to be with papa as soon as I can be."

"Will you allow me to go as far as the Astor House with you?"

"If you'll promise to take the best of care on your way back to your office, Mr. Denby—if you're going there?"

"Oh, I'll take good care," promised Dal, readily, "even if it's only to please you."

As they walked they talked rapidly of many things, though, to Dal's relief, Wall Street and its problems were not once mentioned.

He took her hand again, at parting.

"There's a telephone at the office," he hinted. "May I call you up this evening, Miss Garner, to inquire after your father?"

"If you do, I shall be delighted," she replied, with a sweetness that made their good-bye linger in Dal's mind long after he returned to the office.

True to his word, he called Miss Garner up that evening—twice.

The first time he was told that Major Garner was feeling much better and that the doctor had left.

"Papa hopes to have the pleasure of seeing you soon, Mr. Denby," was a part of the message on the second call.

"Hopes to meet me soon?" Dal quizzed himself. "Then, by crickets, he shall—as soon as I have a new and decent suit of clothes!"

It was safe and pleasant at the office that evening.

Dal had not a worry over any attempt that might be made against him.

The three new men who came to guard the safe, the office and its occupants were from a reliable detective agency.

Dal slept soundly on his sofa, awaking long before it became time to open up the new day's campaign on the stock market.

Again Dal sat at the desk, buying—always buying and helping to keep Traction stock soaring upward.

At the end of this day Dal was through with the stock

market. He had carried out his instructions to the full, and John Spofford owned a hundred thousand more shares of Traction stock, which had closed strong at a hundred and ten.

Dal's task was over—the last order carried out. Acting for his money-king employer he had thrown a little more than ten million dollars into the market on the successful bull movement for Traction.

That night, again, Dal slept at the office—he and Tom—for their own safety.

The following morning the leading papers of the United States contained an advertisement signed by John Spofford, in which he assured the public that Traction stock had safely reached and would stay at 110. He warned all holders against being flurried by any further senseless bear movement.

Traction remained steady, therefore, despite the further efforts of Spofford's enemies to growl the stock down.

Spofford had kept faith with the public, and had saved the investments of those who had followed his earlier advice.

The members of the System, who had tried to loot the public by their bear campaign, had failed, and at an expense of many millions.

Dal went to his same desk, on this morning of the third day, though he knew there was nothing to do.

"I suppose it's a case of sit here until I get further orders," he told himself.

Before ten o'clock, however, there came a telegram from Washington, signed by John Spofford.

"Well done!" it ran. "Draw from the cashier to get as good a wardrobe as you want. Meet me at the Jersey City ferry at 1.30."

"As good a wardrobe as I want, eh?" mused Dal, as his gaze rested on the cheering words, "well done." "As good a one as I want, when I've got to call on Faith Garner at the Astor House. I wonder how much money Spofford has in bank?"

He laughed aloud at that notion, then hurried out, after a word from Tom and a visit to the cashier.

The wardrobe that he bought in the next two hours was good enough—no doubt about that.

Dal had it shipped to the Astor House in two trunks, where he went himself and registered.

"Judging from that telegram, I'm going to be able to afford a few days at the Astor House," murmured the boy. "Hang it all, I wonder if the major got out of his Wall Street tangle all right? I've been afraid to ask over the telephone."

CHAPTER XI.

ONE CHANCE IN A MILLION!

Dal was at the ferry on the New York side in plenty of time.

The unforeseen happened, though.

Through a slight accident one of the ferryboats was out of commission.

Our hero, therefore, missed the one o'clock boat across. The one-fifteen boat was seven minutes late in starting. By the time it did get under way, Dal was on the forward deck, alive with fidgets.

"Old Spofford is a crank on being punctual," he groaned. "It'll be too bad to have it all spoiled by this tardiness. And I'm afraid it won't be easy to make the old man understand my excuse."

As Dal got out in midstream he suffered the misery of seeing the one-thirty boat from the Jersey side leave her slip on time.

"Spofford's on that boat, too," trembled the boy. "No such luck as his missing it! Confound the luck!"

Had Dal only known it, he had a much nearer danger than that of his employer's wrath.

Mulford the wicked, sore, baffled, ugly, had shadowed our hero for the last two hours.

The fellow was fairly aching for vengeance.

There was "blood before his eyes."

He wanted to even things with Dal Denby, nor did he care to what lengths he went to gain his purpose.

"It's as good a chance as I'll have at the Denby brat," choked Mulford. "It's now or never, if I'm to pay him for cheating me out of as pretty a fortune as ever could have come my way. I wonder if he could swim if I pitched him overboard?"

Yet Mulford was not limited to the mere chance of throwing the boy over the rail.

In one pocket he had a loaded revolver ready; in another, a knife. In a third pocket rested a bottle of vitriol, for Mulford had thought of the scheme of throwing that burning fluid into the boy's eyes and destroying his sight forever.

"Whatever it is, I'll do it before we touch Jersey," Mulford growled; as he hid behind other passengers. "As to what happens to me—what do I care, now that I've missed the money that was to let me live like a gentleman?"

But Dal, all unconscious and unsuspecting of danger, had eyes only for the other ferryboat that was approaching ahead.

"Why, there's Spofford in the bow, now!" quivered Denby, using his eyes, which were almost as good as a telescope, to scan the faces and figures of those visible on the approaching boat.

John Spofford was leaning against the rail, well toward the front, and gazing across at New York.

"What's that, though?" quivered Dal Denby suddenly.

His face paled, his legs shaking beneath him.

His lips twitched, and his hands opened and shut tremulously.

For, just behind distant John Spofford, he had seen another man draw a knife from his right-hand coat pocket.

The knife was close to the rail at the side, so held that the passengers behind probably could not see it.

But Dal caught the glint of the sun on the steel, and understood.

John Spofford, like all money kings, was sometimes in danger from anarchists.

Undoubtedly, this fellow was one of that crew.

Dal could have screamed, as he saw the fellow with the knife squirm gently forward.

But the boy's voice, against the rattle of machinery on the two boats, would not have carried that far.

Suddenly Dal gave a thrill of delight.

For John Spofford turned suddenly.

The glinting steel was quickly returned to the pocket of its owner, who slunk back a few steps.

However, Spofford again turned to gaze at New York.

Now, once more, the fellow with the knife began to edge up toward the money king.

Dal, absorbed in this prediction of tragedy, could never have guessed that the dangerous Mulford was creeping up behind him in identical fashion, and all unnoticed by the passengers around.

There goes that sneak again! He'll stab him soon!" thrilled Dal, under his breath. "There's only one chance in a million, but——"

Mulford, his heart full of the blackest thoughts, was now right at our hero's back!

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

Flash! Mulford reached out with his knife—the weapon chosen at the last moment.

Splash! Just one second before the assailant whom he did not know was near, Dal Denby plunged over the rail into the water.

He was a star diver, an expert swimmer, that boy.

As he struck the water he made a cool, experienced effort to keep away from the suction of the boat's moving hull.

He got clear, struck out—away toward the approaching boat.

Mulford leaned over the rail watching the swimming boy and cursing his own luck.

He could not divine what had prompted Dal to jump overboard, but he knew, at least, that his prey had escaped him.

Now that he was clear of one ferryboat, Dal's practiced eye was enabling him to make surely for the other craft.

What did he hope to do?

He had planned to board the other boat.

Nor was the plan as difficult as it might seem.

While watching the man with the knife behind John Spofford, Dal had noticed the rope attached to a life-buoy trailing over the rail into the water.

The shouts of startled people on both boats who had witnessed his plunge overboard, and who now saw him

streaking through the rolling water, had caused the pilots of both boats to slow down speed.

Those on the forward deck of the boat from Jersey City crowded forward to see what it all meant.

As the boat slowed down, and the noise was less, Dal filled his lungs for a supreme effort.

"Mr. Spofford!" bawled the young swimmer, lustily.

Spofford turned and stared hard at the swimmer, from whom he had just removed his gaze.

"Look out for that chap behind you, Mr. Spofford! He's trying to stab you! Do you hear me? Stab you!"

Evidently, Spofford did hear, for he jumped, instantly, clear of the railing, glancing suspiciously about him on all sides.

The thing had been done—the warning given.

What remained was for Dal to swim alongside. He clutched at the trailing line.

"Hold the rope fast!" he called. "I'm coming aboard!"

Clutching at the line, Dal made rapidly upward, hand over hand—an easy feat that soon brought him to where eager hands seized him and hauled him aboard.

"What did you jump and swim for?"

"What's the meaning of all this?"

Passengers crowded around to ask eager questions.

But Dal swept them aside, fire in his eyes, as he sought out and pointed at the man who had threatened the money king's life.

"That fellow has a knife, unless he has thrown it away!" accused Denby, fiercely. "Seize him! Search him!"

A deck-hand and two or three male passengers sprang upon the accused one.

That individual did not offer any resistance. He did not even quiver as the deck-hand ran his hands nimbly down over his clothing.

"Here's the pen-knife," flushed the deck-hand, as he grimly brought to life a knife with a nine-inch blade.

A New York policeman in plain clothes, who had sauntered through from the rear, now got busy.

"I'll take charge of this chap," he announced, and produced handcuffs, which he fitted on the sullen prisoner's wrists.

"He was edging up behind Mr. Spofford to stab him," accused Dal. "I saw it all from the other boat—the knife included. That was why I jumped and made a try for it."

"A pretty good stroke. I won't forget it," chimed in a voice from behind.

Young Denby turned to find John Spofford's hands resting on his shoulders.

"That took some nerve, Denby," smiled the other,

quietly. "A different kind of nerve from the other thing that you did so well for me."

"Not so very different, either," flushed Dal. "I've been dodging about for my life lately."

"So? Well, I shall hear all about it. But these wet clothes—we shall have to get you dried out."

"That'll be easy," laughed Dal. "I've got plenty of dry clothes at the Astor House. Besides, I'm not chilled—much!"

His teeth were chattering just a little as the boat touched the slip on the New York side.

Spofford led him ashore, signalled a cab, and they got in after a hurry order had been given.

"You took my advice about a new wardrobe, then?" queried John Spofford, as they rode along.

"Followed it to the letter—like all of your other orders."

"Then you have some really good clothes?"

"I did just what you said," responded Dal. "Got the finest—just as good a wardrobe as I or any other fellow could possibly want."

"I'm glad you did, Denby. It was one of the things that you've earned."

"I hope your bank account is strong, Mr. Spofford!"

"As to future reward?" smiled the money king.

"Oh, no, sir! But just wait until the cashier tells you what I drew for that new wardrobe."

"Perhaps we'd better go to luncheon first, then," laughed the money king. "I don't want a good appetite spoiled."

John Spofford was more amiable than most of his employes had ever seen him. He seemed thoroughly satisfied with life, as well he might be after having had his own way in Wall Street.

"You're stopping at the Astor House?" he asked, presently.

"Yes, sir—for to-day, anyway."

"Did you know that that is where I often stop when I'm living downtown?"

"No, sir, I didn't."

"Then how did you come to pick that hotel?"

Dal stammered, flushed, stammered, then became silent.

"You went there for reasons that are none of my business, eh?" demanded Spofford, his shrewd but kindly eyes searching the boy's face.

"I wouldn't like to say it that way, sir."

"But you went there for good and sufficient personal reasons of your own that are not in any way connected with my affairs?"

"That's true, sir."

John Spofford leaned back, puffing at his cigar. They were soon at the Astor House.

"Go to your room; take a rub-down and change your clothes. In about twenty minutes I will send for you," directed Denby's employer.

So our hero hurried to his room, got off everything, towelled himself briskly, then proceeded to array himself in one of the best-looking suits of clothes that he had bought that morning.

He hurried, because he knew that John Spofford was not accustomed to being kept waiting.

Just after he had finished he heard a knock at the door and opened it.

"I'm to take you to Mr. Spofford," announced the waiter, who stood there.

The boy was conducted along corridor after corridor, and then taken into a pretty private dining-room.

John Spofford stood there, warming his hands at the grate fire.

"You're prompt, Denby. I'm glad of that, for I'm very hungry."

Then they seated themselves before the most appetizing luncheon that Dal Denby had ever seen or tasted.

Not much was said until the dishes had been removed and the waiters had withdrawn.

"Denby," began Mr. Spofford, as he puffed at his after-luncheon cigar, "I suppose you have wondered somewhat as to why I picked you out for such an important bit of work."

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Well, there were several reasons," went on the money king, slowly. "In the first place, as you know, I like to promote my best people rapidly, and drop all the dead wood as I go along. In that way I get the best and most effective service. I had had my eye on you for some little time as one who might be useful to me in my business. That's the first reason why I gave you this task."

"There were big things at stake in this game, Denby. For a long time, in my market letters, I have been advising the public that General Traction was going to be a good, solid stock to buy and hold for investment."

"The people took me at my word and bought heavily. The Sys—— I mean, my friends, the enemy, wanted to control General Traction without having to put too much money into the job. Naturally, my enemies resented the movement that put the stock up so high."

"My enemies waited, and gathered their forces. Then they got ready to bear down Traction stocks. That much I learned, for I have spies in their offices, just as they have in mine."

"The bear movement in Traction stock was intended to put down prices and scare the public so that prices would

go tumbling. When the price reached rock-bottom it was their scheme to buy in cheaply from the panic-stricken public. Thus my enemies would get control of enough of the stock, at very low prices, and at the expense of thousands of small investors who had followed my advice."

"So you will understand, Denby, that I was in honor bound to beat the miserable scheme. I got together something more than ten millions of available funds, and prepared for the fight."

"My first move was to go away—to disappear. That set my enemies guessing, and rattled their nerve. I was in hopes—great hopes—that they would find out nothing whatever about you, but they did."

"Through Mulford," hinted Dal, quietly. "When we caught him listening he evidently did not hear all you said, or he would not have tried to get me to go to the System's office and repeat to them all you told me."

"Yes, I suppose so. You will wonder why I kept Mulford. For the same reason that I keep a few other men who, I know, are the enemy's spies—so that I can watch my enemies through the moves of their spies in my office."

"It did no real harm, however, after all, to have the enemy discover that you were handling the move for me. As soon as they discovered that their opponent—on paper—was a young clerk, almost an office boy, these enemies jumped to the conclusion that the whole move was only 'another of Spofford's bluffs.' As a matter of fact, Denby, I never make a bluff. It's poor business."

"But there you sat, Denby, giving orders in the bull movement, and my enemies knew everything that you were doing, or thought they did. They figured that you wouldn't have authority to go far, and so they covered everything you did—and kept expecting you to stop."

"But the activity in Traction stock, and its constant rallying power every time the bears assailed it brought the general public feverishly into the market, just as I had foreseen that it would. Now, Denby, the fight is over, and Traction will stay up around a hundred and ten for a good long time to come. My enemies are out twenty millions, and a good beating. The beating they have, and most of their lost money is in my pockets."

"I don't quite understand how the messages from you got on the ticker tape," Dal suggested. "Perhaps you don't care to tell me, either."

"I'm not going to tell you, lad, but perhaps you can guess," replied the money king, smiling. "The tickers are controlled by the telegraph people, and I can't buy those people. But don't you suppose that a man with my bank account can find a way to buy some of the people who get up the news for the ticker?"

Dal nodded.

"And now, for yourself," went on Spofford. "I've put you through a bigger test than I ever had the nerve to put a young clerk through before. But you've stood the test, and I'm satisfied with you. Naturally, you will get a good deal more money for your work after this. In fact, if you care to, you'll be able to live at this hotel. If you stick to me, and do just right, you'll be a fairly rich young man in a few years. That has been the case with Dalton, for instance. He's bright, quick, sharp, and I've always been able to trust him. You may wonder why I didn't give Dalton charge of this last move. It was because Dalton had other important work to do. Besides, he's surrounded by some spies of the enemy whom I want to watch."

"Now, that's about all I have to say, Denby. Go to the cashier in the morning, and you'll find ten thousand dollars waiting your order. Bank it, and use it—but don't ever succumb to the temptation to gamble in stocks. If you do, I'll find it out—and then I'll be through with you. So will you give me your word never to gamble in stocks?"

"I give you my solemn word," Dal promised, soberly.

"Stick to that, and I've no doubt that you'll be rich one of these days."

Rich! For ten thousand was wealth to Dal Denby, dweller in a "sky parlor" at a wretched boarding house!

Hot and cold, trembling, our hero rose as his employer did.

"Good afternoon," nodded Spofford. "Of course you needn't go back to the office this afternoon."

"Good afternoon, sir. And I don't know how to thank you."

"You don't need to, Denby. I thank you instead."

Dal hurried away, for he knew that he had been dismissed from the presence of his busy employer.

"I wonder what he means to do for Tom Green?" quivered the boy. "I was dying to ask him, but Spofford is a man who don't stand for much questioning."

Dal hurried to the flower-stand, bought a flower for his button-hole, and then made his way to the desk.

Shaking a trifle, and more hot-and-cold than he had been at any time in Spofford's company, Dal took a card and wrote his name thereon.

"Send this up to Miss Garner, please," he asked.

In a few minutes the bell-boy was back.

"Miss Garner will see you in the ladies' parlor," was the message.

Dal followed the servant to the parlor.

Miss Garner was not there.

Minute after minute passed, and still no sign of her.

"I wonder if I'm in the wrong room?" Dal thought, anxiously.

He was tempted to ring and find out, but hesitated; through the fear of seeming "green."

A half hour went past. Then there was a soft rustle, and Faith Garner, slightly flushed, eager, delighted—beautiful—rushed up to him, with both hands held out.

"Oh, Mr. Denby, I've been waiting—it seems like an age—to see you!"

"Why, was I in the wrong parlor?" asked Dal, quickly.

"Oh, no, of course not," and Faith laughed merrily. "I mean, I thought—I hoped—you might call yesterday. But I know how terribly busy a young man in your important position must be. And I have kept you waiting, now, but I felt that I couldn't come down until I looked at my very best."

"If you ever looked any better than you do now," Dal blurted out, honestly, "then I wouldn't be able to look at you at all. It would be like staring at the bright glory of the sun."

"Noble!" laughed Miss Garner, blushing, though. "I didn't know that a Wall Street man could turn a compliment like that."

But Dal had simply spoken the truth. He knew nothing about women's attire, but he did know that this bewitchingly pretty slip of a girl could not have arrayed herself in anything else that would have set off her beauty to the same perfection.

"Oh, here's papa!" cried Miss Garner. "He is most anxious to meet you, Mr. Denby. Papa, I wish to present Mr. Denby."

Major Garner, a fine, white-haired old man, of erect carriage and courtly manner, stepped forward to take Dal's hand warmly in his own.

"Mr. Denby, I don't know how I'm going to thank you for the tip you gave my daughter. I stood to lose the only forty thousand dollars I had in the world. But we—Faith and I—played that tip carefully and thoroughly, and pulled out two hundred thousand dollars ahead. I'm cured of going into the stock market, too."

"The tip?" Dal repeated, bewilderedly.

"Oh, of course," chimed in Faith, softly, "you don't want to admit that you gave me a tip on the market. You don't have to admit it, Mr. Denby, and we shall never tell any one. But you can't realize the depth of gratitude that we feel for you."

"I was afraid that the shock of losing would leave my little girl without a daddy," went on Major Garner, tenderly. "But when we got the hang of the right side of the market it seemed to brace up my damaged old heart. I

feel like a boy again, Mr. Denby—and a most lucky one, thanks to you."

"The tip?" Dal repeated to himself. "Why, I didn't give her the shadow of one—was most careful not to, in fact, for I wasn't wholly sure that she didn't come from Mr. Spofford's enemies."

But aloud, Dal said:

"Do you mind telling me, Miss Garner, just how you understood and played the tip?"

"Why, it was the easiest thing in the world, you delightful fellow!" Faith cried, impulsively. "Why, when I asked you if it would be safe for papa to hold on until the stock rose to a hundred and ten, you pointed out to me the danger that the bull and bear fight would keep it shifting up and down, so that papa's margins would be wiped out."

"Yes."

"And so, of course, I understood your hint," Faith went on, simply. "Papa and I sold out when Traction was up three points. When it dropped four we bought in again, sold on the next rise, bought at low ebb again, and so held on until the market closed yesterday afternoon. Just before the close we sold out for good—two hundred thousand dollars ahead. I reasoned that you knew, and meant to tell me, that Traction would keep going up and down. Did I understand your tip rightly, Mr. Denby—or did I stupidly play it the wrong way and get out with less than we should have done?"

"You did it just right—couldn't have done it better or more cleverly if you had tried!" Dal declared, warmly.

"Why, my little girl is pretty clever," broke in the beaming major. "But of course it was easy for her when she had such an excellent hint from the one boy in Wall Street who really knew."

"Pumped, and pumped dry, by crickets!" gasped Dal to himself. "She pumped it all out of me—out of my words and face—when I prided myself that I wasn't saying a word to a girl whom I feared was sent by the enemy! Whew, but I'm glad the enemy didn't send a really clever woman to me! A smart woman would have got Spofford's order list when I thought I had it locked in the safe!"

Then, as Dal's gaze rested, lingeringly, on the smiling, girlish face, he muttered to himself:

"This is the kind of girl for me!"

"What are you doing the rest of the day, Mr. Denby?" asked the major.

"Nothing."

"Won't you come up to our rooms now, then, and dine with us to-night?"

Dal would and did. He got a glimpse of a different world that day.

The following morning young Denby was at the office bright and early.

First of all, he was instructed to draw his ten thousand and take it out to bank it.

Then he returned to the office—to a new set of duties.

Tom Green received a thousand dollars, and an increase of pay to fifteen dollars a week.

Dal wanted to see Tom come out much better, but Tom, while a splendidly faithful fellow, was a plodder, none the less, and the world is full of plodders.

But Tom has now advanced to a position where he draws a comfortable salary and enjoys his family life outside of business hours.

Mulford, within the week, got into a scrape in New Jersey that sent him to prison for ten years.

Dal has prospered and flourished wonderfully in his new duties.

But best of all, he thinks, he dines with Faith nearly every night now.

She's known as Faith Denby in these days.

Major Garner is still alive, and enjoys a sunny old age with his children, as he calls them. But he has two grandchildren, too.

THE END.

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